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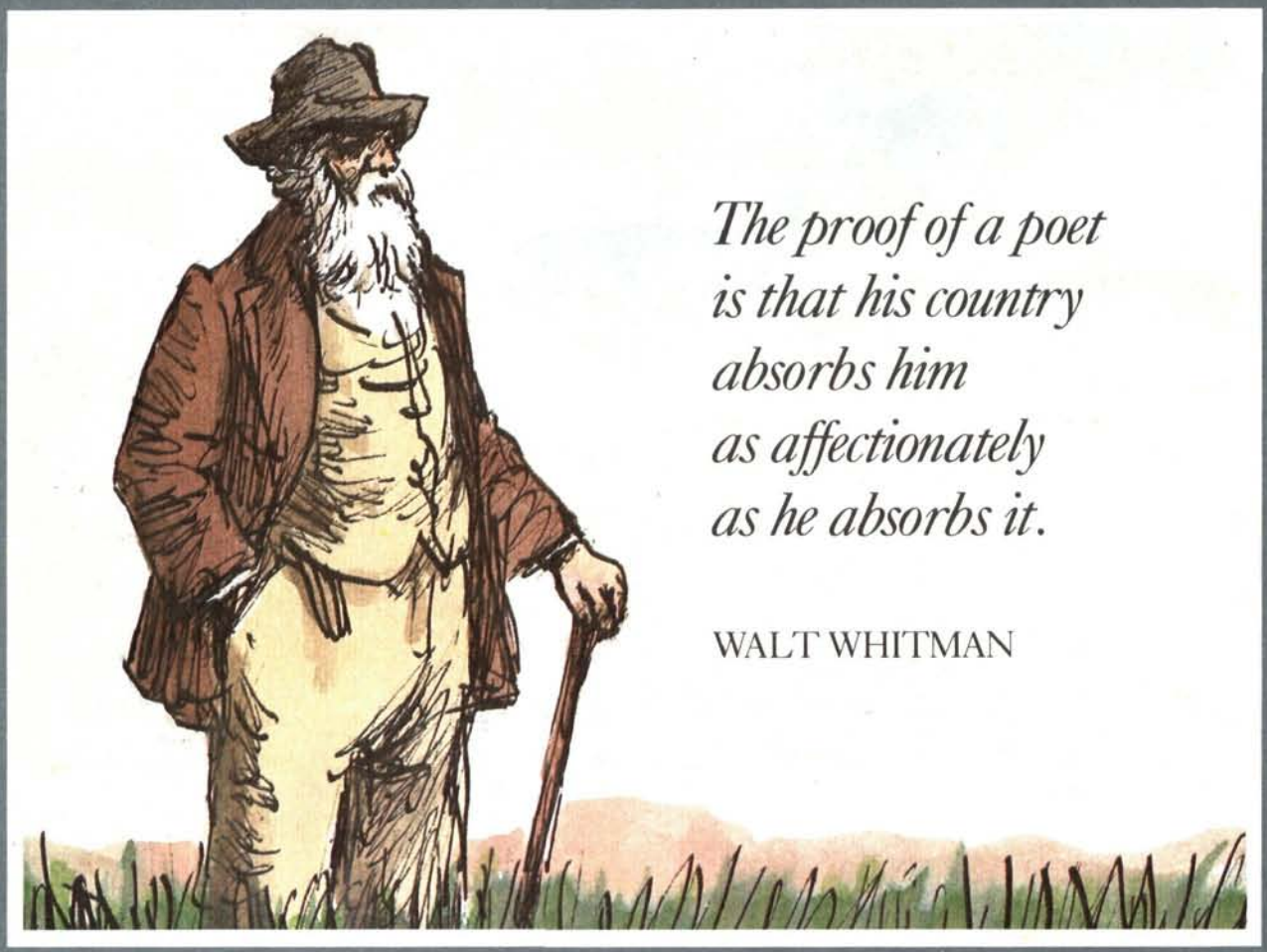
CHRONICLES OF CULTURE

LETTERS & ARTS MORALS & MANNERS



Jorge Luis Borges on Walt Whitman

VOLUME 8 · NUMBER 3 · MARCH 1984

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Leaves of Grass

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COMMENT

In 1855, two daring books came out in America. One was the work of that very visible and scholarly poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who, in his unassuming way, was to the United States what Tennyson was to England; the other, a slim volume, was written by one Whitman, a Brooklyn journalist. Both works were American experiments. Longfellow used the sing-song cadences of the Finnish *The Kalevala* for his Red Indian tale; Whitman's starting point was the book of Psalms. *The Song of Hiawatha,* now left to children and to the historians of literature, was widely read; Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote to a friend: "How I hate wishy washy, of course without reading it." *Leaves of Grass* found at least one grateful reader, Emerson, who had also foreseen it and who had called Whitman his benefactor.

Leaves of Grass cannot be thought away. Such major poets as Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, and Pablo Neruda were led to their quite different achievements by that strange book. Sandburg could handle the vernacular far more deftly than Whitman; in the meantime *Huckleberry Finn* had been written. Whitman went from the common speech of the streets to crude purple patches; now and then he was apt to go from the ridiculous to the sublime.

I love you, I depart from the material,
*I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead.**

All over the world, *Leaves of Grass* has been imitated and echoed, but the theory behind it has not, I think, been fully understood.

The essential clue is to be found in the second inscription, "As I Ponder'd in Silence." A phantom, "Terrible in beauty, age, and power," rises before the poet and tells him that there is but one theme for poetry: war. The poet answers that he also sings war, *"a longer and a greater one than any,"* and that he also promotes brave soldiers. The phantom, of course, stands for epic poetry; Whitman is telling us that the whole book should be read as a single epic: The epic of democracy, obviously. We tend to read it as a series of individual poems; the fact is that the writer went on enlarging it, from edition to edition under the same all-inclusive title.

Whitman read the epics of the past with due reverence. In their pages the hero is a giant who looms and towers over the lesser characters of the fables. In the case of an epic of democracy, this scheme would never do. Whitman stood in no need of a single outstanding hero; he sought a mob of heroes. We may be thankful for the fact that he was no novelist; had he been one, he would have attempted populist and extensive books, packed full of people, after the manner of Dickens or Balzac. He did far better. Instead of mere multitudes, he gave us an undying myth: Walt Whitman.

*Editor's note: Mr. Borges is using an edition other than the 1891-92 "deathbed" edition of *Leaves of Grass* published by David McKay in Philadelphia, which is now considered to be the "standard" edition.

Let us look at a section of a poem:

Starting from fish-shaped Paumanok, where I was born,
Well-begotten, and raised by a perfect mother;
After roaming many lands—lover of populous pavements;
Dweller in Manhatta, my city—or on southern savannas;
Or a soldier camp'd, or carrying my knapsack and gun—or a miner in California;
Or rude in my home in Dakota's woods, my diet meat, my drink from the spring;
Or withdrawn to muse and meditate in some deep recess,
Far from the clank of crowds, intervals passing, rapt and happy;
Aware of the fresh free giver, the flowing Missouri—aware of mighty Niagara;
Aware of the buffalo herds, grazing the plains—the hirsute and strong-breasted bull;
Of earth, rocks, Fifth-month flowers, experiences—stars, rain, snow, my amaze;
Having studied the mocking-bird's tones, and the mountain-hawk's;
And heard at dusk the unrival'd one, the hermit thrush from the swamp-cedars,
Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a New World.

In the foregoing lines fact and fancy are deliberately interwoven. Whitman roams in imagination over the whole vast continent. Actually, he had no experience of the southern savannas, nor of searching for gold in California, nor of a soldier's life, or of the hermit-thrush in the swamp-cedars, nor of the bisons and the flowing Missouri. He did not strike up for a New World while he was in the West, but while residing in some tall house in Manhattan. In this fine poem we find both the real Whitman and the magnification of Whitman. The poet needed more than that. In a now-irrecoverable moment, now lost forever, a third person was given to him, a third person demanded by the epic he was about to write. That person is the reader. You, me, and all the

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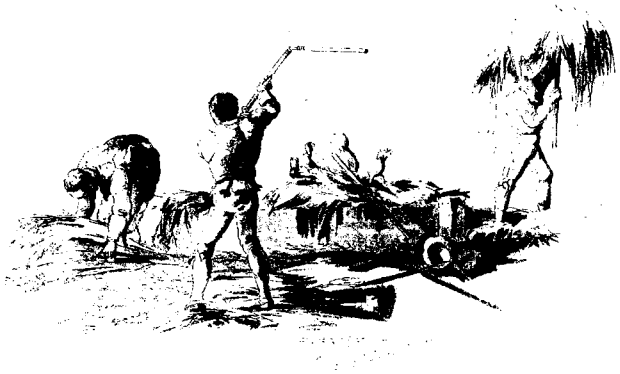

generations to come.

Walt Whitman is a trinity of the man who was born on Long Island in 1819 and died in 1892 in New Jersey, of his image born in all places and immortal, and of the reader who asks him: *What do you see Walt Whitman?* and who is thus also a part of the poem.

Walt Whitman's voice has rung throughout the planet. Every other poet has echoed it, with temporal or local variations. The work has been taken as a model; nobody has attempted his method. For all we know, he was the one man who could do it. Only he could have written:

These are the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands—they are not original with me.

Or

I am the man, I suffered, I was there.

On the event of the awarding of The Ingersoll Prizes, the following message was received from Dr. William J. Bennett, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Ingersoll Foundation is to be congratulated on the establishment of The Ingersoll Prizes. In this time, when the clamor of current issues preempts so much public attention, your dramatic focus upon the finest works of literature and scholarship is greatly needed and profoundly welcomed.

Government support of culture is a risky business; in our tenure we have noted that over and over again. It is upon the activity of private citizens and private institutions that truly free inquiry, scholarship, and culture depends.

The intelligent event you celebrate tonight is symbolic of the heart of support for culture in a nation of free people. My very best wishes to you, and my gratitude to you for this welcome reminder to a sometimes myopic Washington that there is a world elsewhere, and that it is good. □

Or

This is the meal equally set—this is the meat for natural hunger.

Or

After the child is born of woman, man is born of woman; this is the bath of birth and the outlet again.

Art happens, said Whistler; *die Rose ist ohne Warum,* the rose has no why, wrote Angelus Silesius. To explain beauty is to explain it away. I have merely tried to explain the theory behind Whitman's splendid achievement.

A man who goes from *Leaves of Grass* to a biography of the writer inevitably feels that he is being let down. The reason is obvious. The hero of the first is the divine vagabond Walt Whitman; the hero of the second is the poor man of genius who wrought the myth. In 1882, Robert Louis Stevenson penned rather grudgingly these words: "The whole of Whitman's work is deliberate and preconceived."

When a literary experiment is a failure, as in the case of *Finnegans Wake,* we worship it and we take good care not to read it; when it succeeds, as in the cases of the Lewis Carroll books and *Leaves of Grass,* we think of it as easy and inevitable.

—Jorge Luis Borges

Jorge Luis Borges is an Argentinian writer, and the first laureate of the T. S. Eliot Award for Creative Writing of The Ingersoll Prizes.

Darling Artlessness

Italo Calvino: *Marcovaldo or the Seasons in the City;* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.

Judging by this slim volume, Italo Calvino, the world famous, premier Italian writer ("one of Italy's greatest" says the PR bio), is warm, simple, likable, sweet, both in substance and style. *Marcovaldo* consists of loosely conceived and bound tales that compose themselves into a silhouette of a Franciscan proletarian who is sweet, simple, warm, likable, and full of love for nature. He inhabits his not-too-clement, modern, Italian, urban landscape, and he is stubbornly emanating sweetness, simplicity, warmth, and some capacity for sensing what's better in the universe. That's all. Not long ago, we could read in the *New York Times* that Mr. Calvino "belongs to the intellectual school of . . . Kafka, Nabokov and Borges." This linear equation seems to us to be as deft and accurate as one drawn between an abacus and an IBM computer. □

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'Dear Diary . . .'

***The Illustrated Pepys: Extracts from the Diary;* Edited by Robert Latham; University of California Press; Berkeley.**

by Ronald Berman

Samuel Pepys, Clerk of the Acts to the Navy Board, began a diary on the first of January 1660 and continued it until the 31st of May 1669. The original manuscript was, so far as we know, hardly noticed for the next 150 years. In six bound volumes it remained in the Pepys Library of Magdalene College, Cambridge. It had few readers, even among the learned, because the text was for the most part written in Shelton shorthand, a system which had been in use in England since 1626.

In the 19th century, after transcription of the diary began, Pepys became the interest both of scholars and of the public. Over a 60-year period, from 1825 on, editions of the diary began to appear. But there was one thing common to all of them: they were intentionally incomplete. Pepys was ruthlessly honest and very descriptive about his sex life, and this was simply too difficult for the 19th century to accept. So, until 1970, when the whole text was reproduced by the University of California edition of the diary, any copy of it had strategic omissions.

Most of Pepys's text is in Shelton shorthand; some of it is in longhand; a small but important part of it is in a strange mixture of Spanish, French, and English that Pepys used to describe certain moments—usually those of sexual activity. This private language may not have been intended so much to elude detection as to distance Pepys himself from embarrassing moments. One of the reasons why the University of California "translation" of the diary is important is that the private language is for the first time included. The Wheatley edition of 1893-99, previously the standard edition, will have the following entry for 25 October 1668:

> At night W. Batelier comes and sups with us; and after supper, to have my head combed by Deb, which occasioned the greatest sorrow to me that ever I knew in this world; for my wife, coming up suddenly, did find me imbracing the girl. . . . I was at a wonderful loss upon it, and the girl also.

Pepys was being deloused, a more-or-less routine 17th-century practice, and Deb was his wife's pretty servant, with whom he was rapidly falling in love. But the new version of the episode will replace ellipsis with the line "con my hand sub su coats; and endeed, I was with my main in her cunny."

When sex is involved Pepys is both open and secretive. He had what I suppose can best be called a mistress of convenience, a Mrs. Bagwell, whose husband was dependent upon Pepys for promotion and who seemed to acquiesce nicely in the arrangement. But even in discussing the routine in this evidently conscious exchange Pepys slips into his patois: "And did sensa alguna difficulty monter los degres and lie, comme jo desired it, upon lo lectum; and there I did la cosa con much vuluptas."

Although the *Diary* has the deserved reputation of being one of the world's greatest autobiographical works, it covers a period of only nine years. I think that Boswell is more interesting, but Pepys is more informative. The reason that the *Diary* has fascinated readers since the 19th century even with strategic editorial censorship is that it tells us more about life in general than any other book. And I don't mean by this that it covers business, law, the arts, etc. Nor even that it matters because of the first-hand descriptions of the plague and the Great Fire of London. The reason the *Diary* is important is that it is a literary text.

The *Diary* is not only a journal of events but a series of reflections on them. Thus it is a story of consciousness. It is deeply reflective, concerned with dreams, daydreams, and states of mind. It is about the dissimulation necessarily involved in modern relationships between the self and the world. It is often about Pepys's weaknesses—he was hasty, angry, very stingy, and quintessentially lustful—and even more often about his reaction to them. There was a certain amount of Puritan to Pepys, so that the record of his life is a kind of *Pilgrim's Progress* of body and mind. Richard Ollard's excellent biography, *Pepys,* examines the whole Bagwell relationship, which reveals so much about Pepys's willingness to use his office for sexual favors, his meanness, and his opportunistic use of place and circumstance:

> Like the Impressionists he disdains the neutral tints. The actor-narrator provides insights of his own that could support a Marxist indictment of bourgeois exploitation, a Christian exposition of sin, and the more cynical view that morality consists in what one can get away with. . . . Pepys sometimes desires Mrs. Bagwell, sometimes pities her, sometimes despises her. There is no suggestion of love or tenderness. . . . higher feelings were inspired by women of higher class. Lady

Dr. Berman is with the department of literature at the University of California, San Diego.

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> Castlemaine, for instance, or even the Queen, Catherine of Braganza, were the objects of Pepys' cerebral lust, issuing sometimes in dreams of ecstasy.

Robert Latham, the editor of *The Illustrated Pepys,* says that its author shows "a sort of innocence, a love of truth for truth's sake." That seems true enough, but the complexities perceived by Ollard are also there. They seem to be related, one would guess, to the autobiographical literature of the Puritan movement, which stressed the exercise of conscience and of constant self-evaluation. We get the tone even in the fragments of another famous diary, that of Jimmy Gatz, who later became Jay Gatsby.

The Samuel Pepys that one reads—or reads about—is liable to be different from one critic to another. He is certainly different from one passage of his own text to another. *The Illustrated Pepys,* in its introduction, views his outstanding characteristic as a "genius for happiness" but notes that is sometimes overwhelmed by a passionate sense of his own capacity for perjury, and a deep sense of worthlessness. He will invoke the pleasures and peculiarities of sex and within moments write, "I do by the grace of God promise never to offend her more, and did this night begin to pray to God upon my knees alone in my chamber; which God knows I cannot yet do heartily . . ." He sounds very much like Boswell, whose life also was a checkerboard of pleasure and guilt.

There is, incidentally, a first-rate study of both Pepys and Boswell in the context of Enlightenment sexual practices. That is in Lawrence Stone's authoritative *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800.* Stone comes down heavily on both, and judges Pepys to have been an exceptionally virile fantast and voyeur. I would tend to be more sympathetic, but Stone's chapter goes over the evidence and concludes that Pepys had contact with about 50 women in the nine years of his diary, and that nearly all his contacts betrayed some kind of selfish and prudential consideration—not to speak of the extraordinary prolongation of sexual play, which often constituted the whole of his contact. I note that Stone adds that such behavior was either expected or often acceptable at the time.

The Illustrated Pepys should be read for its own pleasure, but to make more sense of it I strongly recommend the Ollard biography previously cited, the Stone history of sexual practices of the age, and the Caedmon recording of passages from the *Diary* by Ian Richardson. The last provides a new insight into the text, as Richardson's wonderfully self-concerned and self-satisfied voice is deployed about Pepys's deep interest in money, success, wine, food, and drama. I note that there is even a separate book culled from the *Diary* on the last. It is called *Pepys on the Restoration Stage* and has been around since 1916. There is an irresistible passage in this book which has not been included in *The Illustrated Pepys:*

> *September 29, 1668.* Then to the King's Theatre, where we saw 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life. I saw, I confess, some good dancing and some handsome women, which was all my pleasure.

It is worth the price of the cassette to hear Richardson reading this. □

Semiotics, Sex, Suspicion

Kaja Silverman: *The Subject of Semiotics;* Oxford University Press; New York.

Jacques Lacan and the *ecole freudienne: Feminine Sexuality;* W. W. Norton; New York.

by Gary S. Vasilash

The Subject of Semiotics, given the generally accepted meaning of the words and the conventional form of the title, would seem to be a book about semiotics, but to use a well-garbled tag: Things are not what they seem. The book *is* about semiotics and is *not* about semiotics, a contradictory condition that should arouse no deep concern among those for whom an escape from meaning and certainty is an ideal to be sought. Kaja Silverman admits from the start that hers is not a book in the tradition of those which have a similar encompassing title and which then provide an overview of the object of the preposition; she explains that her book should be "viewed as a supplementary and explanatory text rather than as one that precedes the reading of any primary semiotic materials." The fact that she uses the word *viewed* rather than *read* is a telling one, as reading in any standard or expected sense is of less importance than is taking a pseudoscientific approach to and attitude toward *written* materials; films, on the contrary, are not to be viewed but exist to be read. The French frontline, who are essentially responsible for such twisted stances, have gastronomic brethren who maintain that food is, first and foremost, to be viewed; matters of the palate are secondary—at best. One day we may be asked to smell books and to touch celluloid; then the medium will truly be the message.

Ferdinand de Saussure, the putative father of the whole thing, defined *semiology* in his *Course in General Linguistics* (published in 1916, three years after his death) as "a science that studies the life of signs within society. . . . Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them." Saussure's use of *science* is a sign that legitimatizes semiotics more than, say, "an *approach* to the life of signs . . ." or "a *theory* about the life of

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Mr. Vasilash is associate editor of Chronicles of Culture.

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LIBERAL CULTURE

Holy Heretics, Batman!

At a recent awards dinner in New York City sponsored by Warner Communications and DC Comics, 18 of the very finest feminist heroines shared $120,000 as Women of Courage, while a photogenic champion of their cause, telejournalist John Chancellor of NBC, extolled their virtues. Among those honored was Agnes Mary Mansour, whose valorous act was

that of resigning from the Sisters of Mercy after the Vatican ordered that she either publicly condemn abortion or quit the state agency funding them. For this singular accomplishment, Mr. Chancellor lauded her "strength to fight, to dare, to laugh at fate, to live through injustice and triumph." Exactly how Ms. Mansour showed strength and bravery or laughed at anything more daunting than her religious vows by defending state-funded destruction of the unborn while being loudly applauded in the media, Mr. Chancellor did not explain. But then perhaps the publishers of *Aquaman, John Jones the Martian Manhunter,* and *The Flash* intend to make all clear by marketing a colorful new publication about this courageous and saintly new Wonder Woman. □

signs . . ." would; it *establishes* semiotics, makes it a subject for serious discourse. And semioticians do nothing if not take themselves seriously. In what can be accounted as a nod to conventionality, Silverman provides a brief sketch of the development of semiotics which, although it can be traced back to Plato, really began with the shade of M. Saussure and received increased impetus with Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Structural Anthropology* (1958). There has been a veritable sign mania within the past several years, as people have been seeking out signifieds and signifiers, and examples of *langue* and *parole,* and then taking care to treat their findings in a synchronic or diachronic mode. It all sounds very scientific and sophisticated. Roland Barthes wrote in his *Elements of Semiology* (1964), "There is at present a kind of demand for semiology, stemming not from the fads of a few scholars, but from the very history of the modern world." The demand still exists 20 years later; that much is true. However, the assertion that the "history of the modern world" is the causal factor is doubtful, as it is really nothing more than a rhetorical flourish, not unlike Saussure's use of *science;* it is a bid for status. Fads are almost by definition more fleeting than modern semiotics has been, but then there's always the case of the Frisbee, which has been floating around for a number of years. There are those who just toss a Frisbee; others, of course, zip the disc, turn a few somersaults, cartwheels, and other gymnastic figures, then catch it behind their backs with their teeth. There are those who use the word *semiotics* as a sort of talisman that automatically confers intellectual respectability (after all, it *is* a science, isn't it?). Others, a select cadre, true faddists, are much more adept at soaring semiology through the corridors of English departments, around corners, and into the offices from whence critical journals and scholarly books emerge. Those who are serious about the Frisbee know that they must constantly twist and turn and generally contort themselves. Serious semioticians do the same thing: old routines are considered passé; new flicks of wrist, or turns of the phrase, must be mastered. Silverman proves herself to be a true devotee. The subject of semiotics, in her handling, is not particularly linguistic in nature; instead, it is that which makes me myself and you yourself. Enter Grand Masters Emile Benveniste and Jacques Lacan.

Benveniste authored *Problems in General Linguistics* (1971), which is most important to Silverman's book, especially Benveniste's "Subjectivity in Language." Therein he discusses the signifiers "I" and "you." As Silverman explains, the signifier 'I' always implies a speaker, to whom it refers. Similarly, the signifier 'you' always implies a listener, to whom the speaker talks. These roles are endlessly reversible." Both pronouns, then, make sense only in specific discursive situations, just as "here" and "there" refer to locations in space known only to an "I" and a "you," as in, "You, there, throw the Frisbee over here, to me." The revelation that is couched in all of this back and forth (and which also involves the mishmash of the "speaking subject" and the "spoken subject") is that language is written or spoken by an individual who addresses one or more individuals. Therefore, the subject that Silverman is concerned with is the subject of psychoanalysis, the human psyche. This brings to the fore Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst who died in 1981. Lacan was rather upset with the fact that there were (and still are) a number of Freudian apostates. Lacan figured that Freud had said it all but that he had been unable to properly frame his ideas because semiotics hadn't been fully developed in Freud's day. So Lacan set out to apply the framework; he went back to Freud and brought him forward in new French fashion. Silverman performs something of a third-order function as she writes about Freud through Lacan. The point that she finally *seems* to make is that a person comes to know him- or herself only through language, which isn't a peculiar conclusion for a semiotician, one who makes her living with language. The grid isn't quite so simple, though, because, she claims, "language functions as an agency for repressing and hence for structuring the unconscious," so ideological limits on language, created

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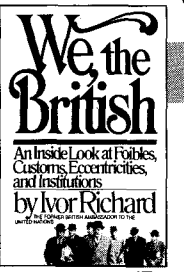

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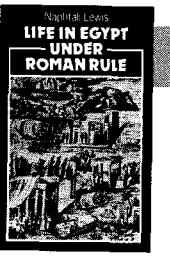

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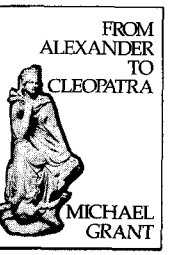

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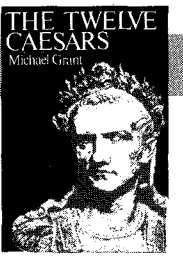

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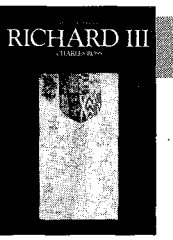

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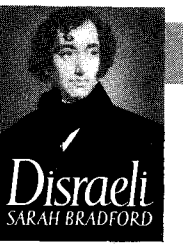

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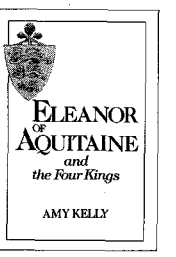

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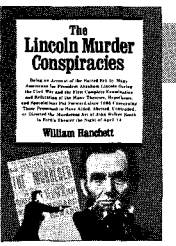

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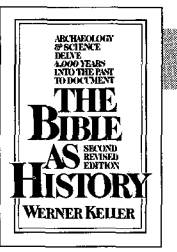

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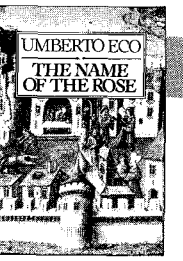

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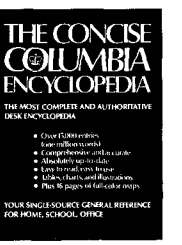

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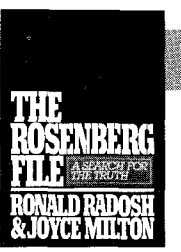

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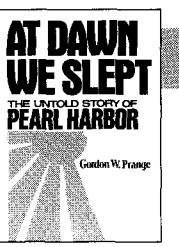

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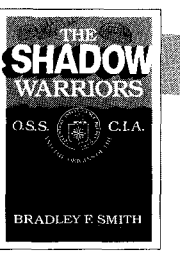

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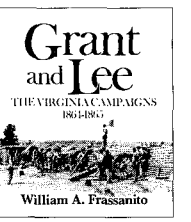

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by those who determine the usable terms of discourse, permit only authorized desires and such. So, through the application of semiotics to psychoanalysis, or vice versa, one should be able to see through the artificial walls of what most consider to be civility and thus become a fuller, more whole individual—unless that person goes mad trying to make sense of the "deliberately a-systematic" schema of Lacan that's so admired by Silverman. As a sign-reader of yore might have put it while poking through some entrails, "Things are overly ripe here."

Psychoanalysis is also a fertile ground for feminists, as evidenced by *Feminine Sexuality,* a collection of articles and seminars by Lacan and his school, the *ecole freudienne.* The basic issue is the difference between a man and a woman. Everyone, presumably, knows what that difference is, but Freud cautioned his peers and heirs that "we must keep psychoanalysis separate from biology just as we have kept it separate from anatomy and physiology." In other words, Freud had staked a claim and he wasn't about to let any interlopers take it away from him. Ignore the obvious, forget the fact that there are material differences between men and women (and between the sexes of all other species, for that matter), that God or Nature had deemed the arrangement a pretty effective way of maintaining the proliferation of life forms throughout the ages. The turf of the psychoanalysts is the unconscious, so the discourse about the difference has to be conducted through nonmaterial means. Freud had showed that many of the problems of humans are located in their psyches and that these difficulties are essentially sexual in nature. Now it seemed that the unconscious is a neuter sort of place (though Freud posited a single libido that is "invariably and necessarily of a masculine nature"), or at least it is at the very start, before culture started land development operations and so set up various fences and walls. Culture is language bound, so it is a simple step for Lacan to point out that the real difference between a male and a female is simply a linguistic one. We are, after all, merely "speaking beings," he says. Thus what was historically thought to be the most obvious distinction, the penis, becomes the symbolic phallus, which is no longer a physical difference but a metaphysical one. It is, as Lacan defines it in "The Meaning of the Phallus," "the signifier of the desire of the Other." The Other for Lacan, Jacqueline Rose explains in her introduction to *Feminine Sexuality,* is a "fantasied place," "a point of certainty, of knowledge and of truth" that does not exist. Desire, Lacan maintains, "is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference resulting from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting *(Spaltung)*." A little linguistic addition of these terms provides the result that the phallus signifies nothing. So while it might *appear* that men have something that women lack, that something is nothing, the null set at best.

A charge could be raised against this interpretation: It is a simplification. That is true; it does simplify things. There is a contrary tendency in psychoanalytic (and semiotic) literature; it tends to become highly complex and involved. To wit: an editor's footnote to the last chapter of *Feminine Sexuality,* which reads, in part, "Lacan's difficulty in many ways became greater in direct proportion to his increasingly elaborated use of the theory of knots." Alexander the Great had the proper approach to such entanglements. Such verbal excesses, Freud's previously quoted comment about keeping psychoanalysis separate from biology, anatomy, and physiology, and Lacan's now-famous "re-reading" of Freud have a correspondence that leads to a questioning of the viability of psychoanalysis as anything but a practice for a secular priesthood or a club devoted to the marginalia of existence. The cult deliberately closes its ranks, striving not to provide a complete picture of the human subject—as that would involve not only physical sciences, but religion as well—but to create an area of its own, a topography sealed off by ropes tied with knots, a webbing that permits some things to slip out and inhibits anything of consequence from passing in. Not only is this evident in the argot of psychoanalysis (which is undergoing an exchange with the equally tortuous vocabulary of semiotics), but also in Lacan's attitude as time passes, as he moves from rebel to savant. With power, it seems,

Mush

Ross Thomas: *Missionary Stew;* Simon & Schuster; New York.

Ross Thomas's prose style is subtle and smooth; it has an appealing malleability that permits easy insinuation into and over the reader's eye. Indeed, it's like canned cake frosting in its physical suppleness, and the content it conveys has the confection's nutritive value. At one point in *Missionary Stew,* the woman who operates the West Coast bureau of *The American Investigator,* a knock-off of *The National Enquirer,* defends the rag's activity by saying, "We cater to our readers. . . . We have to compete with television for their wandering attention. Therefore, our features need to be a trifle provocative." This is the approach that Thomas utilizes in *Missionary Stew;* he caters to various, though essentially similar, tastes: those who enjoy free-living sexual escapades rendered in a fairly chaste manner will relish an affair and incest; those whose nose cartilage is on the decline will salivate (sniff?) over two tons of coke; and those who hunger for conspiracies and/or government cover-ups will become delirious as Thomas cooks up the FBI vs. the CIA. The grocery store tabloids aren't noted for any substance, just a notion that the world (and, often, the Beyond) is as exciting a place as one of those pizza parlors full of mechanical animals and video games purportedly designed for kids. But it's good enough to make them (in)famous and wealthy. Thomas might pull off a similar gambit with his goulash for the taste-deadened gourmands. □

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comes contempt. For example, during a seminar given in 1972-73, when his fame was fixed, he suggests that his students look up the etymologies of two words in a particular dictionary "which I delight in and which, I am sure, none of you even have in your libraries." Later, he draws a diagram and then says, "After what I have just put up on the board for you, you might think that you know it all. Don't go too fast." Given the cryptic nature of the diagram, it's unlikely that anyone, outside of a person who happened to own Bloch and Von Wartburg's *Dictionary,* would presume to know *anything* about it, to say nothing of "it all." One thing is clear from works like these by Silverman and Lacan: the modern conjurers of metaphysical mysteries who claim to be helping humankind are no less secretive than those of past ages, those whom the moderns claim are partially responsible for our present psychological ills. □

A Grad Student's Delight

Andrew Field: *Djuna: The Life and Times of Djuna Barnes;* G. P. Putnam's Sons; New York.

by Brian Murray

The American writer Djuna Barnes died in the summer of 1982 in New York City at the age of 90. Since 1940, she had lived mostly in Greenwich Village, more or less reclusively. In fact it's probably safe to say that to most of the younger mantra chanters and bongo players who were her neighbors during the 50's and 60's, Djuna Barnes was simply a rather phlegmatic old woman who chain-smoked Kools and rarely ventured past the corner grocery store. Few knew that back in the 20's and 30's she had been one of the queens of *la vie de bohème* and an honest-to-goodness author whose first novel, *Ryder* (1928), had been described by a presumably sober critic at the *Saturday Review* as "the most remarkable book ever written by a woman."

Actually, Miss Barnes was naturally haughty, and she quite liked living like an unmoneyed Greta Garbo. So she was rather annoyed when scores of English professors and journalists equipped with tape recorders and diffident smiles suddenly began turning up on her doorstep in the mid-70's. Sometimes she was downright rude. Andrew Field tells us that a Professor James Scott warned him that when Barnes greeted her afternoon callers, she wore a flannel nightdress and a sneer. Wrote Scott to Field: "I stood the scrutiny of her gaze, her face about a foot from mine, and removed my glasses. . . . I had a fleeting thought, as I took off my glasses, that she might hit me." She didn't; but she did go on and on in her rapid and rasping voice about how she was "the most famous unknown in the world." Scott left with a headache.

That Barnes should have become a bit more famous in the last years of her life isn't really surprising. As a small but growing number of ambitious young academics, hard pressed for fresh and "publishable" research topics have discovered, much of Barnes's fiction lends itself perfectly to extended exegesis: it is derivative, murky, and tissued with symbols. And it has been certified as "significant" by many of the right people—by Anaïs Nin, Ned Rorem, and, perhaps most importantly, by John Hawkes, whose gloomy and coolly constructed "fictive worlds" are now required stops for all who would pass through graduate school in English in pursuit of the Ph.D. Hawkes admires the "extreme fictive detachment" that he finds in Barnes's "pure and immoral" work.

And certainly, the life Miss Barnes led in her youth does make for hot copy. She resided in the Village during the Great War years, at a time when Mabel Dodge was holding court at her Fifth Avenue salon and Alfred Stieglitz was showing off Picassos at his gallery nearby. Barnes knew Dodge and Stieglitz; she hobnobbed with Edmund "Bunny" Wilson and the goatish Frank Harris, too. Back then, Barnes was very much the shocking New Woman—the protoflapper who, as Field puts it, "had affairs with many men," but who took care of her own bills, thank you. Indeed, Barnes made a comfortable living contributing features to the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle,* the *New York World,* and to several other newspapers and magazines. As a journalist, she interviewed Diamond Jim Brady, Florenz Ziegfeld, and Jack Dempsey. She wrote Orwellian exposés of the local down-and-out, and profiled such popular local oddballs as Twingeless Twitchell, a dentist who pulled crowds pulling teeth. She specialized, however, in what is now called in the post-Wolfe era "new" journalism. Thus did she allow herself to be force-fed through a yard of rubber hose on one occasion, and caressed by a gorilla called Dinah on another.

In the early 20's, Barnes followed the crowd to the Paris that still fascinates—to that Paris of Dadaist exhibits, surrealist manifestos and cubist ballets: specifically, to that Left Bank district of Paris which the acerbic Sinclair Lewis once aptly described as "the perfectly standardized place to which standardized rebels flee from the crushing standardization of America." There, over the next 20 years, Barnes established herself as a habitué of such celebrated expatriate hangouts as the Café du Dôme and La Rotonde. There she rubbed elbows not only with fellow Yankees and literary betters Ernest Hemingway and Ezra Pound, but with Ford Madox Ford and James Joyce—the writer she admired, and imitated, the most. There, too, she forged alliances with Peggy Guggenheim, Romaine Brooks, and Natalie Clifford Barney: with many of those hedonistic "Amazonians" who gathered weekly for Pernod and chitchat at Barney's posh quarters in the Rue Jacob.

Dr. Murray teaches English at Youngstown State University.

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Interest in Barnes probably also stems from the fact that her novels and short stories and plays consistently present a radically pessimistic, drearily deterministic view of life that still squares nicely with the prevailing zeitgeist. According to Barnes, man lives amid bewildering flux in a backwater constellation, in an interminable limbo where there is neither joy nor light nor certitude nor peace. Man is himself a superfluous and grotesque creature, characterized principally by a propensity to selfishness and brutality. The best one can do, then, is to adopt a stance of comic passivity—a detached acceptance of the absurdity that is everywhere, and of those intermittent and spontaneous carnal pleasures that provide a bracing respite from the continuing pain.

Undoubtedly, Barnes's unfortunate upbringing contributed greatly to her Weltschmerz. The three principal role models in Barnes's life—i.e., her parents and her feminist-spiritualist grandmother—were all, as Field politely notes, "inept eccentrics." Of them, Wald Barnes, Djuna's father, was surely the most strange. He was a volatile, megalomaniacal, and probably psychopathic character who hauled his wife, mother, and growing brood off to rural upstate New York so that he could run them through his various "experiments" undisturbed by nosy burghers. As Field notes, Old Wald had decided views on, among other things, eupepsia, and for a time made the Barnes kids "emulate the regimen of poultry by swallowing a small amount of finely pulverized gravel as hens do in order that their digestive systems might be cleansed by it." He also called for the breaking of all sexual restraints—and he practiced what he preached. According to Field, Wald Barnes was an inveterate collector of concubines. He was also quite possibly a sodomite and a child molester who, on at least one occasion, brutalized the adolescent Djuna.

Wendell Ryder, the central figure in the lengthy *Ryder,* owes much to Wald Barnes, and is accordingly—not surprisingly—unsympathetically drawn. At times he does appear as a mildly charming iconoclast gutsily defying "the authorities of the state and the wiseacres of the nation." But more often he is nothing more than a phallus with legs, aiming to fecundate anything that moves. He is lecherous, shiftless, stubborn, uncaring, and, in the end, ineffective: he is for Barnes the typical male writ large.

Field tells us that the Barnes he met in 1977 disdained "the exaggerated posturing of the contemporary feminist movement." But you can bet that feminist critics will be foraging about in *Ryder* for years to come, pointing to its "Rabelaisian" gusto and its tacit commemoration of female superiority. Of course, the book is secure in its status as a literary curio—as a remarkable example of just how extensive was the influence of Joyce on the impressionable avant-garde writers of his generation. *Ryder,* indeed, reads as if it had been produced by a clever creative writing student who had been instructed to "construct a novel in the mock-epic mode, avoiding a linear plot structure but being careful to employ each of the following: a) paronomasia; b) parody; c) stream of consciousness." In short, it is stiff, pretentious, and dull—paralyzingly dull.

Field makes no outrageous claims for *Ryder.* But he is very much taken with *Nightwood*—Barnes's novelization of her tumultuous love affair with the sculptress Thelma Wood, another beautiful and mysterious self-exile on the Left Bank scene. *Nightwood* is thick with

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:*

To See the World and Man

The application of truthfulness and rationality to the dissection of ideologies and the promotion of liberty and justice does not mean being confined to a narrowly scientific, quantitative set of instruments. Certainly those who I have called "the defenders of freedom," the Machiavellians, did not rely upon Gallup polls or electronic computers to gain their extraordinary insights into the nature of the political processes. As I observed, a touch playfully, in the opening lines of my book *Congress and the American Tradition,* "In ancient times, before the illusions of science had corrupted traditional wisdom, the founders of Cities were known to be gods or demigods."

—from "To See the World and Man"
by James Burnham

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animal imagery and death symbolism, and is packed with bizarre supporting characters borrowed from the Nathanael West Repertory Company, including one Dr. Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante O'Connor, whose rambling monologues on religion and ethnology and hygiene and God knows what else go on for pages and pages and pages. Field thinks Dr. O'Connor is "of Shakespearian stature and certainly one of the most memorable characters in our century." He describes *Nightwood* as "one of the artistic keystones of its time." And he points out that he is not alone in his admiration. T. S. Eliot, he reminds us, praised *Nightwood's* "beauty of phrasing" and its "quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy." Dylan Thomas, Field claims, thought *Nightwood*—in Field's words—"one of the three great prose books ever written by a woman." This, put simply, is hyperbole. *Nightwood* is better written than *Ryder,* certainly; but its Gothic feverishness and frequent Swinburnian heavy-handedness will forever limit its audience to assistant professors and to those who are nostalgic for the fin-de-siècle—those whose idea of a good rainy-day read is Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* or Huysmans's *À Rebours.*

And what of the logorrheic Dr. O'Connor? Well, his real-life model was an expatriate American and unabashed homosexual named Dan Mahoney. When not performing back-alley abortions, Mahoney killed time by boozily speechifying in the chic bars and cafés that Djuna Barnes frequented. In *Djuna,* Field admits that John Glassco—author of the delightful *Memoirs of Montparnasse*—once described Mahoney as "the sort of fellow who was very interesting to talk to for about five minutes, and then was a bit of a bore." Enough said.

After the publication of *Nightwood,* Barnes published nothing extensive until 1958, when her years-in-the-making "closet drama," *Antiphon,* appeared. Rarely have labor and zeal been more absurdly wasted. For this highly autobiographical rendering of an eccentric family's horrific reunion in a decaying English manor was enthusiastically received by only a handful of Barnes devotees—most notably by Edwin Muir and Dag Hammarskjöld—and has since then probably never been read straight through by more than a dozen determined souls. Indeed, this peculiar collection of loosely connected images and private mutterings has got to be one of three most tedious verse dramas ever written by a woman—or man. Even the charitable Field likens it to "an unfamiliar opera sung in a strange language."

In *Djuna,* as in his controversial 1977 biography of Vladimir Nabokov, Field writes colloquially, in the first person. Too, he employs a narrative structure that is nonchronological, kaleidoscopically episodic. He proceeds intelligently and judiciously for the most part, though at times so digressively—so offhandedly—that things do get a tad muddled. And of course he's quite wrong about Barnes. He wants us to consider her "a major writer of our time." Certainly, some of Djuna Barnes's early stories—like "Aller et Retour" and "The Jest of Jests"—are cleanly, deftly constructed and are, in their bleak sort of way, compelling. And as Eliot noted, there are some lovely "musical patterns" to be found in Barnes's writing, even in *Antiphon.* But if the idiosyncratic Barnes must be ranked among her contemporaries, then she must be placed in the company of the likes of Anna Wickham, James Branch Cabell, and Carl Van Vechten. She may have been James Joyce's friend, but she was hardly his equal. □

Of Belief and the Bourgeoisie

Nicholas Rzhevsky: *Russian Literature and Ideology: Herzen, Dostoevsky, Leontiev, Tolstoy, Fadeyev;* University of Illinois Press; Chicago.

by Bryce Christensen

The English novel, critics commonly aver, is a bourgeois literary form. Its historic origins seem to corroborate this, since the two men responsible for its inception, Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, were both thoroughly middle-class. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is written from the perspective of a small merchant; Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) shows how a yeoman's daughter can marry her well-placed boss if she is industrious, attractive, and hard to get. The creation of art was not a deep concern of either of these authors, nor was it among most of their successors, who made the novel a fixture of middle-class life. Nonetheless, without thinking too much about their role as artists, two centuries of British and American novelists did manage to produce an inestimable treasury of art. But many who are conscious of artistic criteria believe that the novel is now in serious trouble. Even if the genre is not actually dead, most contemporary representations—popular and academic—do justify the response: "No man alive could write such tripe."

The pathology left-leaning scholars often advance to explain the novel's demise is that the form has suffocated within its bourgeois parameters. The themes of adventure, money, heterosexual romance, and social advancement, as well as the equally bourgeois stylistic conventions have become effete, they maintain. Even a cursory examination of the racks of popular fiction would appear to confirm this diagnosis: the front covers are provocative and the back covers adulatory, but the pages between invariably deliver just another stale manipulation of stilted bravado, shallow, boring solipsism, and lust. Even if a few new permutations of the plot-setting-hero

Mr. Christensen is assistant editor of the Chronicles.

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formula still exist, who really cares? Millions of average Americans regularly purchase these books, but how many will ever reread them for their subtlety or insight? Literature (to use the term loosely) generated within such a constricted paradigm is, as novelist John Barth puts it, "exhausted." For Barth and other avant-garde writers like him the way out of this exhaustion is the sweeping repudiation of the bourgeois origins of the novel. Bourgeois themes must be replaced by ubiquitous sex and entropy (usually seasoned with radical politics); bourgeois accessibility of style must give way to experimentation with the obscure, illogical, and random; even the bourgeois audience must be superseded by an elite readership of college professors and despairing intellectuals. The life infused into their new amoral and surrealistic fiction, however, looks suspiciously like postmortem muscle spasms.

Though the death of the novel is not Nicholas Rzhevsky's focus in *Russian Literature and Ideology,* his study can help the reader understand the phenomenon and how it might be reversed. Indeed, if the novel is inherently a bourgeois art form, it seems peculiar that a country like Russia, slow to develop a middle-class culture, should have produced so many of the world's greatest masters, including Tolstoy and Dostoevski. Thoroughly middle-class America has yet to engender such a pair. But the reason is not that the Russian authors were anti-bourgeois. Many of their sympathetic characters are middle-class folk faced with middle-class problems—making a marriage work, paying the bills, helping a friend with alcoholism, making it through school. Moreover, their style is not daunting to an average reader. What, then, constitutes their genius and makes their works deathless? It is their passionate celebration of human values found among every social class but transcending the peculiarities of any one of them. G. K. Chesterton's observation about the great and the common man is especially applicable to the great Russian novelists: "A great man in any age must be a common man, and also an uncommon man. Those that are only uncommon men are perverts and sowers of pestilence."

Finances, courtship, derring-do, and social manners are all elements of major 19th-century Russian fiction, but its ultimate concern, Rzhevsky finds, is with man's "nonterrestrial dimension," his soul, its power to improve or degenerate, and its quest for love and meaning, in time and eternity. Not surprisingly, the systems of belief held by Herzen, Dostoevski, Leontiev, and Tolstoy, their "ideologies" in Rzhevsky's lexicon, were all profoundly influenced by Russian Orthodoxy. As they reacted to currents of modern thought, all four men rethought, adapted, and sometimes flatly rejected portions of that legacy; however, they explored it deeply, recognizing its continuing relevance for modern man. As Herzen declared in an early work, "Man must be connected to God, [must find] peace in him, [rise] up to him in love." Herzen, it's true, did drift away from this vision, but Dostoevski, a far greater writer, "never abandon[ed] the core values postulated in his Orthodox heritage." Thus, in his last novel, *Brothers Karamazov,* when Rakitin explains that in the utilitarian gospel "one can love humanity instead of God," Dmitri responds, "Only an idiot can maintain that."

The English novel, of course, began with a religious heritage, although it was not explicitly prominent. Moreover, a theology of predestined damnation for all but a few capriciously selected souls was not really congenial for a genre implicitly stressing the importance of the individual and his choices. So, after jettisoning Protestantism in favor of a strictly secular viewpoint, Hardy, Crane, and Dreiser moved to a naturalistic denial of man's free will and cosmic importance. In contrast, the Orthodox heritage gave Dostoevski reasons for joyously affirming the divine worth of the individual—even as he plumbed the darkest abysses of the psyche—and made the transform-

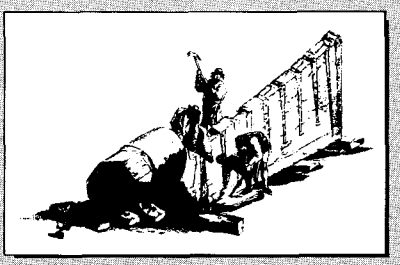
LIBERAL CULTURE

Ustinov in Oz

Peter Ustinov is an actor, playwright, musician, and raconteur—sort of a Dudley Moore for the New York and Hollywood demi-intellectuals. Mr. Ustinov, who is half Russian, recently published a book entitled *My Russia* (Atlantic-Little, Brown), which, while purportedly being about that land mass in Eurasia, seems to describe a creation of the author's inventive mind. For example, consider his hearth-and-home explanation for what is commonly called imperialism:

> The Russian method of aggrandizement has always been rather different from that of more traditional colonial nations. Since Russians suffer easily from homesickness, they . . . simply lean on neighbors' walls until these collapse under their weight, and then help to rebuild them a little further away from where they had been before.

Isn't that neighborly approach ("help to rebuild them") sweet? It conjures up visions of the entire Red Army making samplers and quoting Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz:* "There's no place like home." And there's no place like Mr. Ustinov's subject, at least not on the spatiotemporal plane most consider to be reality:



> my Russia is not a prison, as its enemies think of it, but more a school, sometimes even a kindergarten.

We'd like to suggest that Mr. Ustinov enroll. □

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ing power of the free will a sacrosanct tenet. Because he abhorred all aesthetic or political theories which denigrated either of these doctrines, Dostoevski parted company with the leading Russian critic Vissarion Belinsky, a materialist, and unsuccessfully warned his countrymen in *The Possessed* about the spiritual emptiness of political radicalism. Even Tolstoy's professed belief in the determinism of historical "forms" should not, Rzhevsky demonstrates, obscure his conviction that personal free will gives those forms their cognitive "content." Pierre's groping search in *War and Peace* for the meaning of life, concluding in the bourgeois satisfactions of family life, is manifestly a spiritual exercise of the will.

As important as the individual is in Russian literature, the ego is nonetheless measured against the Christian standards of humility, love, and service. Without these guides, Dostoevski's Father Zossima explains, evil follows:

> Everyone strives to keep his individuality, everyone wants to secure the greatest possible fullness of life for himself. But meantime all his efforts result not in attaining fullness of life but self-destruction, for instead of self-realization he ends up by arriving at complete solitude. . . . This terrible individualism must inevitably have an end.

This is a prescient indictment of modern American culture, where "terrible individualism" has not yet had an end, though meaningful fiction almost has. Of course, great literature has virtually disappeared in Russia, too, for a different reason, though not as different as is sometimes supposed.

Many Western critics believe that 20th-century Russian literature is moribund because it is "too ideological." On the contrary, Rzhevsky demonstrates that the fault is that it is too *little* ideological. That is, because communism does not permit anyone to think and feel independently, artists cannot express "the active and honest involvement of their own thought and emotional commitments." Hence, "it would be more appropriate in this regard to speak of the ideological hypocrisy, rather than the ideological enthusiasm of Soviet fiction." It would seem appropriate, too, to ascribe the decline of the Western novel not to the predominance of bourgeois values but to the absence of *any* meaningful ideology, in Rzhevsky's sense, though here the philosophical vacuum is often openly confessed, even perversely affirmed as a positive good. Through "original" and "self-assertive" characters, modern American authors try to convince themselves and their readers that the autonomous self need bow to no suprapersonal imperatives. But the repeated failures of such soulless and egotistic creations to establish any significance in their existence or to form satisfactory relationships with anyone else, including the reader, manifests the aesthetic and moral falsity of such a view.

Rzhevsky is understandably heartened by the sporadic revival of Russian fiction through the work of men like Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn. By reasserting "the religious sense of communion with a transcendent order of things," these men act as a "reminder of values and beliefs that have been eroded or completely lost in the West as well as in the Soviet Union." Indeed, if Dostoevski, Tolstoy, and Solzhenitsyn are correct in believing that spiritual regeneration must precede any major social or cultural advance, then Russians and Americans of every social and economic class must rediscover the truth dramatized in the poignant conclusion of *Crime and Punishment* when the murderer Raskolnikov opens the Bible and begins to read. □

Sentimental Fool?

Aram Saroyan: *William Saroyan;* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.

William Saroyan: *My Name is Saroyan;* Coward-McCann; New York.

by Mark Royden Winchell

Aram Saroyan tells us that in the aftermath of his parents' unsuccessful try at marriage, his much-abused mother threw a typewriter at her husband.

> "'I don't want it,' she yelled. 'It only writes one thing anyway.'
> 'What's that?' Bill asked.
> "'I love people . . . I love people . . . I love people . . .'" Carol chanted at him.

Unlike Jonathan Swift, who detested mankind but got along tolerably well with individual persons, William Saroyan was a famous humanitarian whose swinish behavior toward family, friends, and casual acquaintances makes him a case study in liberal sentimentality. Although Saroyan himself has long since been relegated to a minor niche in the literary history of the 1930's, many of his attitudes toward life and art are still very much with us.

In 1957, Edmund Fuller characterized the self-righteous amorality of Saroyan and company as the "new compassion." Such a view of the world amounts to a canonization of ethical relativism, or—more properly—ethical populism; for here good becomes an inherent property of the social outcast and evil is a term to describe only the rich and powerful. This sensibility, according to Fuller, "may be the most unwholesome and dangerous single symptom in modern literature, for as there is nothing more appealing than the cloak of compassion, there is nothing more treacherous when it is false."

To find a credo for the new compassion one could hardly do better than to look at the saccharine preface to Saroyan's most celebrated play, *The Time of Your*

Dr. Winchell is author of William F. Buckley, Jr. *(Twayne).*

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Life. Written in the imperative mood of a street-corner harangue, this preface enjoins *you* to: "Encourage virtue in whatever heart it may have been driven into secrecy and sorrow by the shame and terror of the world." In such a world *you* should have "no shame in being kindly and gentle, but if the time comes in the time of your life to kill, kill and have no regret." The climax of Saroyan's play occurs when a kindly and gentle fraud who "looks as if he might have been Kit Carson at one time" kills the jack-booted cop who has been terrorizing Saroyan's pantheon of saintly drunks and two-dollar whores. The new compassion is never having to say you're sorry.

At his best, and in *The Time of Your Life* he is surely at his best, Saroyan exerts a subversive appeal which cannot be simply dismissed in a fit of moral pique. Like that later sentimentalist J. D. Salinger —whom Norman Mailer once characterized as "the greatest mind ever to stay in prep school"—Saroyan remained an ingenuous adolescent in the first glow of puberty long after senility had set in. As such, he is a writer who—like Salinger and Thomas Wolfe—can seem a seer and savant to sensitive kids just beginning to experience the mysteries of literature. There is a time in our lives when our moral maturity and social grace are incommensurate with our capacity for wonder. It is at just such a time that we are most vulnerable to the new compassion.

Saroyan was nothing if not prolific. In a 1934 letter to *STORY Magazine* editor Martha Foley, Saroyan confessed: "I very much dislike letting a day go by without writing a short story." As if to back up his claim, he sent Foley a new story every day for a month after she had bought his initial submission, "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze." With such a prodigious output, he took to writing under several pseudonyms (when Foley asked him about a certain Armenian from Boston, which turned out to be one of his own identities, Saroyan replied that the man was a cousin who had been taking manuscripts out of his wastebasket). Although he produced an average of a book a year from 1934 through 1979, much of Saroyan's work was never collected in his lifetime, and some has escaped the scrutiny of even the most sedulous bibliographers.

To separate such a personal and self-indulgent writer as Saroyan from his work is no more possible than to separate the dancer from the dance. For that reason, Aram Saroyan's recently published biography of his father holds interest for both critics and voyeurs. The usefulness of this book is limited, however, by both its brevity and its bias. "Aram" (who, in the true egalitarian spirit, refers to everyone —including his parents—by his or her first name) was not close enough to "Bill" to give us a potboiler in the lurid tradition of Christina Crawford and Gary Crosby, so he takes the "high road" and writes the sort of psychobiography that appeals to persons whose idea of an intellectual is Dr. Joyce Brothers. Nevertheless, he does manage to convey some interesting information.

Despite his own grand literary pretensions, or perhaps because of them, Saroyan felt threatened by cleverness or intellect in women, and he almost broke off his courtship with Carol Marcus when her letters showed signs of both. She was able to redeem herself in his eyes only by admitting that those letters had been plagiarized from ones which her friend Oona O'Neill had received from her beau Jerry Salinger. (Oona would later become Mrs. Charles Chaplin and Jerry the author of *The Catcher in the Rye.*)

The Saroyans' first marriage ended when Bill discovered that Carol was Jewish. Responding in shock, he tore the covers off her naked body. "'Look at you,' he told his wife, 'all white and pink and perfect. Do you mean to tell me that you're Jewish? How can that be possible? Come on, kid. You're not Jewish. How could someone as beautiful as you be Jewish?'" Although Aram thinks that Bill was angered more by his wife's independent spirit than by her genealogy and

Raspberries for the Common Man

Raymond Carver: *Cathedral*; Alfred A. Knopf; New York.

Raymond Carver uses short sentences. Not like Hemingway. Sort of like Vonnegut. But Carver isn't trying to be amusing. Perhaps profound. It's hard to tell. Maybe he suffers from writer's cramp. Or the margins on his typewriter are set too close. It's hard to tell. But it works for him. It gives him his style. It's compact. Not like a foreign car. More like an old Rambler. They don't build Ramblers any more. It's just as well. Few bought them. Plenty buy Carver. His style, not his books. He isn't a best-seller. Not yet. Nowadays critics are his market. It will get bigger later. What will readers find? Short stories written with short sentences. Like: "It's cold out, but not too cold. It's a little overcast." He lets the reader add "But not too overcast." It's common sense. Many things in his stories are like that. Commonsensical. Characters say things like "A wink is the same as a nod to a blind man." Is Carver alluding to the original: "Say the word; a nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse"? It's in Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794). No, he's probably not. It just has a folksy sound to it. Like a man's description of his wife: "Fran's a big tall drink of water." Folks say things like that. And folks are big nowadays. Not like they were in the 1930's and 1960's. Then they had political significance. In the 1980's they represent little things. Better things. No AIDS or herpes.

Some critics say Carver's a minimalist. Mainly because of his style. His subject matter helps, too. Form and content. But the critics forget something: ideas. There are emotions in Carver's work. Gross ones. None of the nuances Faulkner and Ralph Ellison wrote about. So the folk in the stories can be treated like they were when they had political significance: like museum pieces. Rustics. Curios. Inhabitants of a sideshow. But inarticulateness doesn't mean arrested development. Consider the critics. They're eloquent—like mad. □

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that his anti-Semitism was more a function of Armenian pride than of race hatred, it is a bit more difficult to rationalize Saroyan's characterization of Hitler as "a great zealot." Indeed, this liberal humanist, whose typewriter was so in love with people, was actually somewhere to the right of Ezra Pound.

> ". . . the book becomes a philosophical statement, about birth, about life."
>
> **Joel Oppenheimer**
> ***The New York Times Book Review***

Nor was Saroyan's disingenuousness limited to his racial views. Although he grandly refused the Pulitzer Prize for *The Time of Your Life* (arguing that "commerce had no business patronizing art"), he was not above claiming half-credit and half-royalties for Rosemary Clooney's hit song "Come-on-a-My-House," even though it had been almost entirely written by his cousin Ross Bagdasarian.

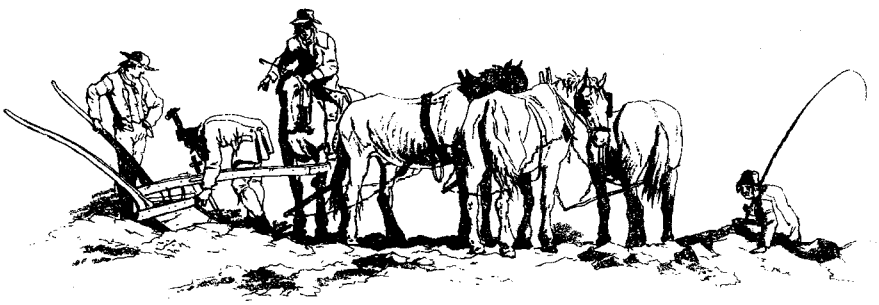
Aram Saroyan's book is not entirely exposé, however; he attempts, in the end, to redeem both himself and his father with the obligatory deathbed reconciliation scene. Accompanied by his daughter Cream (younger sister of Strawberry), Aram visits his cancer-ravaged father in the hospital, where the elder Saroyan bravely faces death without the aid of painkillers. As they weep and embrace, William Saroyan paraphrases the title of his most famous play by telling his son: "It's the most beautiful time of my life . . . and death." However noble this final gesture of love might have been for the emotionally scarred Saroyan, his will made no provision for his family, but instead established and funded a foundation to bear his name and house his papers. That he did not realize that those papers might have commanded a good price from a private collector's library is evidence more of naiveté than of humility.

William Saroyan's ultimate significance is not as a troubled and Dionysian personality, but as an artist who was singularly dedicated to the vocation of writing. It may be that his incredible prolixity was an attempt to cheat death of its final victory. In *The Time of Your Life,* a learned longshoreman named McCarthy suggests that would-be writers need "more magazines. Hundreds of them. *Thousands.* Print everything they write, so they'll believe they're immortal." (Saroyan's own official last words, which he phoned to the Associated Press a week before his death were: "Everybody has got to die, but I have always believed an exception would be made in my case. Now what?") It is therefore fitting that two years after Saroyan's death James H. Tashjian should edit a new collection of his work, consisting largely of pieces never before published in book form. Retrieved from the files of three Armenian periodicals located in Boston, these stories, poems, and plays may not be—as the jacket blurb claims—the "literary find of the decade"; but they will surely help to confirm Saroyan's reputation as a gifted, if minor, writer.

With the exception of *The Time of Your Life* (which, almost by default, remains one of the great comic plays of the American theater), Saroyan's métier was the short story and the personal essay. His bag of tricks simply was not sufficient to sustain a full-length novel. Saroyan's short pieces, however, were not the sort of well-crafted world-in-a-window artifacts which are so popular among teachers of "creative writing." Essentially a raconteur with a broad sense of the comic and an occasionally lyrical feel for language, Saroyan was at his best when he stayed close to his roots and wrote of California's immigrant Armenian population. When he attempted the avant-garde, as in the stream-of-consciousness collage in the first paragraph of "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze," his work seems simply forced and dated.

Given his own subsequent experience, it is more than a little ironic that some of Saroyan's most engaging fiction should deal with old men facing death. In "The Explosion," for example, an old tailor turns to farming in order to be close to the soil in his declining years. When he contracts consumption, the old man kills a cow for a final communal meal, and—even though it is winter and the trees bare—decides to dynamite the hardpan in his orchard. Fearing that he might not live until spring, he longs for a bang not a whimper.

Saroyan's greatest failings were an inability to control and nurture his modest talents and a view of the world which stressed sentiment at the expense of morality. Even when he is entertaining, he reminds one of what Queen Victoria said of a three-hour Good Friday service—that it was altogether too much of a good thing. And in helping to spawn a later generation of fashionable sentimentalists (Salinger, Vonnegut, et al.), he has given us altogether too much of a bad thing. In *The Time of Your Life,* a barroom metaphysician identified only as "The Arab" pronounces Saroyan's best epitaph when he says of things in general: "What. What not. No foundation. All the way down the line." □



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Bicycling Through Europe Wearing Blinders

Wright Morris: *Solo: An American Dreamer in Europe: 1933-34;* Harper & Row; New York.

by James H. Bowden

Those unfamiliar with Wright Morris's fiction probably won't read this book; if they do, they no doubt will be puzzled by a vision that could be called nonjudgmental by educationists, laid-back by the intellectually lazy, sketchy by a writing teacher, and any number of other bemused epithets. I choose *detached.*

"This wacky episode has a wonderful, unexpected ending . . . any reader can savor this wise and whimsical little book."

Jim Miller
Newsweek

". . . the best I've read since Frank Conroy's 'Stop-Time.'"

James Atlas
The New York Times Book Review

Some might see that vision as benign, but I don't think so, though Morris does seem to be a photographer manqué, one of the sort who is even more of a voyeur than is ordinary for practitioners of that craft. For one thing, there is the seemingly absolute precision of recall: when this partial autobiography begins he is leaving California for his *Wanderjahr* and after an ex-professor of his drops him off in Utah he hitches eastward till a couple of farmers pick him up, they being interested chiefly in whether he can read. A college almost-graduate (Pomona, 1930-33, but he doesn't say so in *Solo*), he can indeed read. He interprets a Listerine label for them, and they apply it for a palliative to the rump of a gelded horse; all is recorded dispassionately, meticulously, and all quite immediately —we are there. But the only interpretation offered is that Morris has to lie in the cool grass face down to steady himself after seeing the swollen horse. That is as involved as he gets.

He passes through Central City, the Nebraska town in which he grew up, but little is said of it or his family, or of the world prior to 1933. Very American, for Morris there is no sense of one's being in medias res; there is no Hebraic grammar of man caught between what was accomplished and what is yet to be done. It is always Now. Yet there is little mystery in this; it is only a black and white snap of how it is.

After working a summer to get his stake—$360—in the Schlitz Garden Café at the World's Fair in Chicago, a job gained him by a fraternity brother (that's as much detail as is given about brother, job, Chicago) he's off to New York. From there he sailed on a freighter to Antwerp, meeting on the trip one Sol Yellig, of Brooklyn, who, when sailing past the Statue of Liberty remarks, "What a joke."

And that's about it for Sol. Morris says that until he met two on the ship who spoke German and until he "had some long talks with Sol Yellig, I thought there had to be something special between people who spoke the same language. I found that there was. The dislike they had for each other was more refined than that for people in general." Maybe that's precise enough.

Interestingly, as an endorsement for his craft, when he experiences a storm at sea, he wanted to know the difference between it and Conrad's storms. Docking in Antwerp he sees first of all their famous whores, whom he avoids for fear of picking up a nail. He avoids nonwhores too, though one muses on how matter-of-factly such encounters would have been recorded had he indulged. Indeed, though he must have read Freud, he seems not to have paid it much mind. Perhaps his sexual circumspection was the result of his having a girl back in the states whom he was to marry upon his return: he doesn't want her to read about any youthful peccadillos. But the marriage was dissolved nearly three decades later, so each condition (divorce and time lapse) is sufficient to permit truth now. But the truth seems to have been chastity, which probably was only slightly less rare then than now. And in the book

Dr. Bowden is author of Peter De Vries: A Critical Study *(G. K. Hall).*

In the Mail

Vietnam Heroes III: That We Have Peace **edited by J. Topham; American Poetry Press; Philadelphia.** Heartfelt words by the men who are almost forgotten and those near to them.

A Guide to Bird Behavior, Volume II, **by Donald W. Stokes and Lillian Q. Stokes; Little, Brown; Boston.** More than taxonomy, an ornithologist's field-day field guide.

The Case for Character Education **by Frank G. Goble and B. David Brooks; Green Hill Publishers; Ottawa, IL.** Ethics in public schools are like the janitors: somehow there and necessary, but little evident. Herein is a call to up the image of ethics.

The Holy Fool **by Harold Fickett; Crossway Books; Westchester, IL.** The novelistic treatment of an L.A. preacher; a comedy that transcends the quotidian.

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Liberal Culture

And Who Will Get the Goldfish?

From California, the state which led the way to personal fulfillment and liberation through deliberate childlessness and convenient divorce, comes a report of an unforeseen complication. It seems that a considerable number of new-class couples are buying a pet as a "child substitute" and then finding it difficult to resolve who should get the animal when they go separate ways. Indeed, in a recent landmark court decision, a couple were awarded joint custody of their Fido as a part of their divorce settlement. Which can only make one wonder, how many couples are staying together for the sake of the dog? □

he does not mention post-FY34 events: in the moment are the past and present found, wrote Eliot, but that was poetry and this is fiction.

Nonetheless, that is how he does it, leaping into being ex nihilo, like a culturally ignorant Martian. And yet, one gets rather used to it, and even becomes fond of it. If, finally, it is a bit precious, too studiedly noncommital and expressive of that mythical entity called Innocence that is ever longed for by Americans, it does leave the reader with a feeling of *being there.* The only odd thing is that he doesn't seem to have come from anywhere himself: he likes Spengler, hasn't heard of Kafka (that would be expected for one then ignorant of German), and that's about it. He seems to have taken on a persona rather like the one Whitman adopted occasionally, a mask behind which he only reported what he saw; of course there is bias in that too, since what one chooses to report, however objectively, amounts to editing.

But there seems very little of that, even: almost by accident (it was raining in Paris, he couldn't understand conversations) he chose Vienna over France, and set out to learn German. He met people, bought an excellent bike, had a room overlooking a *Blind Garten* where stately people strode carefully about; he lost weight, heard a few "Heil Hitlers," went casually to visit an isolated and authentic castle. The friend who had led him there left almost immediately, but Morris stayed on with Monsieur and Madame Deleglise at Schloss Ranna. The Meister of the place "had tried being a native in the South Seas, and being an Indian in Arizona, and since the stock market crash he had tried living in the Middle Ages." The castle is one in which Richard the Lion-Hearted might have stayed, but Morris had done a paper on him and was not impressed by the flea-bitten and frightened bully—he merely reflected that life at the castle had not changed much since Richard's visit.

Madame was once a minor-league opera singer, and her dreams are somewhat catered to—a faithful retainer proclaims that she has sung in Venice, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Cedar Rapids—though it is rumored she is a prisoner in her room, or environs. But that's as far as Morris takes it: Madame once *says* she's a prisoner. Morris enlightens us no further than that; he creates a madmen-peopled castle tableau that might chill Charles Addams, but, like all tableaux, mainly it just stands there, quivering slightly. Lest anyone think Morris totally a disinterested spectator, however, there are a few signs that he was there, too, as blind as the rest: once he sees a huge swastika shoveled out in the snow; it was, he wrote, "another time I had failed to read correctly." Then, in the spring, like Hans Castorp (Morris's comparison) he descended the mountain and met an American friend who surely was one of our dullest exports that year.

Then the attempt to step out of time was over, and he consciously rejoined the human condition that he—like other aliens—had pretended for a time, at least, not to be a part of. When he had occasionally at Schloss Ranna "seemed to see through a crack in the veil of one time into another . . . [he says] what I had seen through were the cracks in my extravagant expectations."

Summing, the dominant trope—though he doesn't play it at all for what it's worth—is the *Blind Garten:* he watched the sightless go about its regular pathways, seemingly normal except for occasional abrupt moves, and that is largely what he saw the folk of Europe do in 1933 and 1934. He includes himself in that blind walk, and it is a triumph that his style fits his content, something that happens only in the best art. It can be misleading, this style: he is an American writing of an American and for Americans, for people who generally take Innocence as not a possibility—that would be remarkable enough in the post-Edenic world—but as a *given!* He has shown how the scales fell from the eyes of one of our breed, though nothing cataclysmic occurred. Only the most stupid need cataclysms, and they can't see it even then. Morris, who must be a very gentle man, saw the seed of corruption in a rather minor incident, but he knew what it meant. For Augustine it was stealing pears he didn't need. □

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COMMENDABLES

Seeking Civil Pleasures

Turgenev: Letters Volumes I and II; Edited by David Lowe; Ardis; Ann Arbor, MI.

by Harold J. Harris

Unlike other aristocratic Russian writers and intellectuals of his generation, Ivan Turgenev never wavered in his devotion to an absolute artistic freedom conjoined with absolute political freedom. These were, however, the only absolutes to which he did hold, and, as his letters testify he held to them almost always in the low-keyed manner of the man who desires above all to give pleasure in both his art and his personal relationships. In 1831, when he was 13 years old, Turgenev began writing his painfully literary letters. He continued to write them into 1883. David Lowe has translated 334 of those letters, many of which were never previously translated. In his famous death bed letter of July 11, 1883, he implored Tolstoy to again take up the artistic burden that had always been rightfully his as the greatest Russian writer of their generation. Tolstoy, as is well known, had never been pleased with Turgenev as either a man or a writer, but the letter did obviously succeed in giving pleasure to people, including the famous memoirist Pavel Annenkov, Alexander Herzen, the anarchist wildman Bakunin, and the Slavophil father and son Sergei and K. A. Akesakov.

Dr. Harris is with the English department at Kalamazoo College.

Possibly because of his steadfast intention to give pleasure to all his correspondents as well as to the readers of his fiction, Turgenev seemed to have been extremely well-equipped to remain detached from the bitter, internecine intellectual warfare of his time while remaining attached to those individuals for whom he geniunely cared. Perhaps nowhere better than in an 1872 letter to an obscure, aspiring young woman writer does Turgenev express the essential modesty of his intentions when he first demurs at being showered "with praise that would be appropriate for Shakespeare or Goethe," and then goes on to disclaim being a genius. "I have no pretension," he tells her, "to such a sonorous title; I'm already satisfied and happy that with my writings I have given a few pleasant moments to some of my fellow countrymen—and perhaps I was not without influence on their moral and spiritual development."

But that very modesty, coupled with the recognition that he possessed neither the desire nor the ability to write so as to influence "the Russian people," kept him in constant trouble with every one of his fiercely political, didactic, and variously radical friends, as well with Tolstoy and Dostoevski. What he wrote to Tolstoy in 1857 he might as well have written to three dozen other people, and with exactly the same resulting displeasure shading into anger:

> To take a look to the left is just as nice as to the right—there are no impediments—there are perspectives everywhere . . . all you have to do is open your eyes wide. God grant that your horizons widen with every passing day. The only people who treasure systems are those whom the whole truth evades, who want to catch it by the tail; a system is just like truth's tail, but the truth is like a lizard; it will leave the tail in your hand and escape; it knows that it will soon grow another tail.

One of the most notorious of the Russian system-builders of the period was the wretched (as man and certainly as novelist) Chernyshevski, whose execrable *What Is to be Done* was greatly admired by Lenin, who always spoke warmly of Chernyshevki's influence on his political development. Chernyshevski is one of the very few contemporaries Turgenev singled out by name for ridicule. Usually, he generalizes about the Slavophils or the Western-hating radicals, though he savages both groups in an 1862 letter to Herzen. In a later letter to Herzen, a propos of Bakunin, he says, "I quite agree with you that I'm not a political creature: but if it comes to that, I confess that it's better to be a non-political person such as I am than to be a political one in the style of Ogaryov or Bakunin." As he did with Tolstoy, Turgenev was forever trying in his letters to conciliate Herzen, a far more intelligent and decent man than Bakunin. An ardent socialist and champion of the peasant commune, Herzen was most difficult to conciliate or to please. But no more so than—on Turgenev's right—his old Slavophil friend Sergei Akesakov or the latter's son, or even further to the right the fine poet and ferocious reactionary A. A. Fet.

The chances are that if he had been left alone or had lived in a democratic society such as our own, Turgenev would have cultivated his literary and his literal garden, taken pleasure for himself and given it to his friends, and kept a wide berth of everything that even smacked of the political. Yet, perhaps not so paradoxically, what he did write of a political nature generally was first-rate. In fact, among the Russians of his generation, there were no better writers on the themes of freedom and human rights.

It was, though, less political ideas or social institutions than the individuals who create them which loom largest in his letters, as they do in his novels. The depiction of character and the description of nature, are the two things that readers today find most pleasing in Turgenev's writing. In a letter to Bettina von Arnim there is a long set-piece that offers a view of nature every bit as beautiful as any found in *Fathers and Sons* or *On the Eve.* It favors the reader with considerable pleasure, something that would have greatly pleased Ivan Turgenev. □

Of Sainthood & Scholarship

E. Harris Harbison: *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation;* William B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, MI.

Voicing a question that has echoed through 17 centuries of Christianity, Tertullian asked, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem, the Academy with

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the Church?" and answered, "We have no need for curiosity since Jesus Christ, nor for inquiry since the Evangel." Certainly those who have followed Tertullian in the tradition of Christian anti-intellectualism have not lacked for scriptural justification, most of it, ironically, from the pen of the most learned of the Apostles, Paul, who insisted that "faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God," and that therefore any man "wise in this world" must "become a fool" as a Christian. Nonetheless, many Christians since Tertullian, including Jerome, Aquinas, Valla, Erasmus, Luther, and Calvin, have answered his question differently, seeking to remain true to the Church without excommunicating the Academy, and trying to achieve worldly wisdom without betraying the salvific "foolishness" of Christianity. In his classic study *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation,* here reprinted in a new edition, E. Harris Harbison shows that their efforts, though often laudable, were sometimes ambiguous and did not always redound to the glory of the Church. Jerome was for a time tormented by the fear of divine judgment for being a Ciceronian, not a Christian; Aquinas came to regard his *Meisterwerk* as "rubbish"; Valla discovered that central Catholic documents were misattributed or forgeries; Erasmus allowed Folly to mock him and other intellectuals in the name of Christianity. But it was in the Protestant Reformation that the relationships between learning and devotion became especially crucial and painfully difficult to resolve.

For though the reformers struggled to wrest the Scriptures away from a scholarly Catholic elite, to remove the layers of erudite commentary, and to give the pure word of God directly to the common man, Dr. Harbison perceptively demonstrates that these very tasks themselves required the uncommon skills of scholarship. Indeed, far from being a popular uprising, the Reformation was, at least at first, the revolt of intellectuals. But after repudiating the exegetical privileges of any educated priesthood and putting the translated Bible in every hand, Protestant scholars began to wonder what ecclesiastical precedence they had over any unlearned dolt who claimed to be inspired. Luther, nervous about calling himself "prophet" and initially disdainful of the "papistical" arrogance of his doctoral title, finally came to assert that it was precisely his academic degree that set him apart from "sneak-preachers." Main-line Protestantism has largely followed Luther in this direction, thus creating a new quasi-priesthood of academics to interpret God and his Word for the laity. Since the epistemology of scholarship does not appear to offer any particular advantages for knowing or having faith in God, His Love, and His Spirit, this seems a dubious method for establishing a minister's credentials. Indeed, as

modern scholarship in general has grown more skeptical, materialist, utopian, and radical, main-line Protestant clerics have had little choice but to redefine the basis of their pastoral authority or to bend to these destructive winds of doctrine. Too often they have chosen the latter course, and their congregations have been scattered like leaves. But when the Academy thus conquers and misgoverns the Church, God has ways, as the learned Sanhedrin discovered, of regathering his people behind foolish but devout fishermen, tax collectors, tent-makers, and carpenters. (BC) □

In Focus

Books for the Hen House

Carol McMillan: *Women, Reason and Nature: Some Philosophical Problems with Feminism;* Princeton University Press; Princeton, NJ.

Marietta Holley: *Samantha Rastles the Woman Question;* University of Illinois Press; Urbana.

Lynne Spender: *Intruders On the Rights of Men: Women's Unpublished Heritage;* Pandora Press; Boston.

Dale Spender: *There's Always Been a Women's Movement This Century;* Pandora Press; Boston.

by Barbara Worden

The modern feminist movement has been in existence long enough—over 100 years—for the standards by which its publications are judged to be fairly high. Movements of ideas that are in infancy contain a certain amount of intrinsic interest; however, a long-term political movement must make claims for its public ideas on the basis of creative expression, reasonableness (i.e., "horse sense"), and the ability to explain the world both as it is and as it should be. The beginning of Carol McMillan's *Women, Reason and Nature* qualifies well under all the above standards, but it develops some unsightly twists in the middle so that, by the end, the book is a distorted oddity. The author begins by exploring in various ways the limitations of the traditionally masculine virtue of reason, especially with reference to aesthetic and literary endeavors. Men are shown as depending on scientific approaches, eschewing metaphysics. Ms. McMillan subtly distorts her argument by using examples of intuitive knowledge drawn from characters in literature and in life who are invariably female. Thus, the author underlines the stereotype that women don't and can't and shouldn't try to think "like men"; at the same time she claims she is saving women from the feminists who are implicitly downgrading women's intellect by demanding that they use "male" reason and opt for scientific fields of study. Trying to separate and determine who, if anyone, is degrading whom is difficult and possibly futile. There are, after all, male novelists and artists and female scientists and mathematicians, a fact which Ms. McMillan tries to ignore by claiming such cases are not sufficiently general to be judged "natural." Ultimately, the reader is left with the same question he started with: What is in fact natural in the abilities of men and women?

Jane Curry's edition of portions of the Samantha books of Marietta Holley does a war dance on Ms. McMillan's dual-nature

Dr. Worden is professor and librarian at the Houston Graduate School of Theology.

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theory by skillfully confusing the usual stereotypes of men and women in a portrait of the trials and tribulations of Samantha Allen, a 19th-century commonsensical rural housewife, and her weak, male-chauvinist husband, Josiah. Contrary to the belief that men are strong, independent, logical trees while women are fragile, emotional clinging vines, Samantha is a logical steamroller, 200 pounds of mighty oak, while Josiah is an emotional, illogical 90-pound weakling. Marietta Holley uses dialect for comic effect in the manner of Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, and Josh Billings. It is amusing as well as illuminating to watch Josiah attempting to squirm off the impaling pin of his wife's logic.

Samantha's other favorite opponent is Betsey Bobbet, a man-crazy old maid who is always chattering on about "women's sphar" in a fruitless attempt to capture the affections of some unwary member of the stronger (?) sex.

> Betsey resumed, 'it is so revoltin' to female delicacy to go to the poles and vote; most all of the female ladies that revolve around in the high circles of Jonesville aristocracy agree with me in thinkin' it is real revoltin' to female delicacy to vote.'
>
> 'Female delicacy!' says I, in a austeer tone. 'Is female delicacy a plant that withers in the shadder of the pole. . . . Female delicacy flourishes in a ball room where these sensitive creeters with dresses on indecently low in the neck, will waltz all night with strange men's arms around their waists, . . . Betsey, is it any worse for a female woman to dress herself in a modest and Christian manner, with a braige veil over her face, and a brass mounted parasol in her hand, and walk decently to the pole and lay her vote on it, than to be introduced to a man, who for all you know may be a retired pirate, and have him walk up and hug you by the hour, to the music of a fiddle and a base violin.'

Even though Betsey and Josiah's intellects and personal weaknesses make them obvious targets for Samantha's cannonballs of logic, the strong-minded heroine always has the same sort of half-irritated, half-affectionate sympathy for them that she would have for a bleeding, battle-scarred mutt returning from combat with the neighbor's tomcat. She knows they are to blame for their wounds, but she sympathizes with them nonetheless because they belong to her.

The discussions of women's rights are rooted in the good black earth of such then-contemporary issues as the 1888 controversy over seating women delegates at the General Conference of the Methodist Church. The excellent notes at the end of each chapter provide interesting political background, but actually, the cutting edge of Ms. Holley's logic is the carefully observed picture of rural American life in the 19th century which is so rich a source of metaphors.

Two Australian feminist writers, the Spender sisters, have produced books of widely differing quality on other aspects of the feminist movement. Lynne Spender's volume, *Intruder On the Rights of Men,* attempts to deal with women writers' struggles to penetrate the male-dominated publishing establishment, but even within this rather restricted subject, the author shows signs of indecision about her true subject. The book is alternately a tragic history of women writers' attempts to break into print and a jeremiad against the print and electronic media's lack of openness to female executives. There is no chronological order, to give it at least an air of purposeful sequence, instead it haphazardly jumps back and forth between the two subjects. Dale Spender's engaging little volume is a collection of five brief, well written biographies of early-20th-century feminist leaders, only one of whom, Rebecca West, is especially well known. The title of the first chapter, "Lighting the Corridors of History," explains Ms. Spender's purpose—to give a sense of continuity to the history of the modern feminist movement, to bridge the gap between the win-the-vote movement and the more recent one that began in the 60's. □

Dubious Prognoses

Michel Salomon: *Future Life;*
Macmillan; New York.

Near the end of World War II, Henry Eyring, a pioneer in chemical kinetics, was walking with Albert Einstein near a "victory garden" at Princeton planted in what appeared to be some sort of beans. When Dr. Eyring asked Einstein what type of plant they were looking at, the brilliant physicist replied that he did not know. Dr. Eyring's conclusion, shared with impish delight with hundreds of students, was that "Einstein didn't know beans." Although the publisher of Michel Salomon's *Future Life* assures us that the 18 leading medical scientists here interviewed are "better qualified than most to predict what is in store for man," readers will likewise discover that, outside their own specialties, many of these men do not know beans either. Even in predicting the course of medicine, in which their past accomplishments are remarkable (worthy of the Nobel prize in six instances), these researchers disagree sharply on such fundamental issues as the foreseeability of breakthroughs in cancer treatment and the prolongation of life. And when asked also to prophesy the future of culture, ethics, and society, they frequently reveal more arrogant ignorance than prescient insight.

When, for instance, an immunologist proclaims that immunotherapy "will lead to the ultimate secret, the structure, in sum, the truth of the whole phenomenon of death," the reader can only wonder what bizarre pathogen induces such quasi-metaphysical ranting. Just as ludicrous is the repeatedly expressed hope of inventing "a new morality of biology," based upon "science itself and the principles that have allowed it to become universal" rather than upon traditional religious or philosophical bases. But upon what scientific principle shall humans like Attila the Hun be judged biologically inferior to those like Francis of Assisi? In our own age, the genetic material of Russians who supported Stalin has fared far better than that of those who opposed him. One of the seekers for a new "scientific ethic" vaguely senses his dilemma and tries to weasel out of it by asserting that "the sense of values, all that makes for good and beauty, is genetically fixed." He apparently offers this as a scientific defense of Judeo-Christian norms, but it seems just as plausible as a justification for murderers, rapists, thieves, and terrorists: "DNA made me do it." Another neocasuist coldly deduces from scientific logic that mankind must reduce the number of "those who no longer play a role" and are therefore "waste matter." "I very much hesitate to use this term for human beings," he lamely confesses, even while he censures nazi doctors for their lack of "conscience," a most unscientific faculty.

But not all of those interviewed

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evince such symptoms of terminal scientism. A Belgian biophysicist recognizes that it is "dangerous" for anyone to be considered "more competent to judge today's society" simply because of scientific acumen, and he firmly disagrees with his skeptical interviewer's dismissal of religion as "irrationality," averring that "religion is a perfectly rational system once one grants its premises." Similarly, an American biochemist from Austria identifies "the idolatry of science" as part of a "new barbarism" destroying "all moralities, all the decalogues of humanity." Sensing that "poetry and music are better indicators of the future than science," he sees the current "crisis in the arts" as an ominous portent. One can only hope that such sane physicians as these can cure the megalomaniac delusions of their colleagues. For if the narrow values of laboratory manuals ever fully replace those of art and Scripture, then the global experiments which must follow will reduce us all to living cadavers. (BC) □

Dodging Bullets and Issues

Roger Rosenblatt: *Children of War;* Anchor/Doubleday; New York.

Among the horrors of war, few are so awful as that of the suffering of children. The most innocent of victims, they are also the least able to understand the causes of conflict or to deal with its agonizing consequences. Certainly, most people who read Roger Rosenblatt's sympathetic but deft portrayal of infants and young people orphaned, wounded, and traumatized by violence will want to do all they can to reduce such tragedy in the world. Contemplation of the plight of Northern Irish, Palestinian, Israeli, Cambodian, and Vietnamese children caught in webs of combat, however, does not necessarily lead to its termination, for among those who have witnessed these children's pain longest and most closely are too many who are causing it. Moreover, the most unspeakable torments en-

dured by these children—forced to execute other children by the Khmer Rouge, reduced to starvation and cannibalism when fleeing Vietnam—were not experienced *during* war but *after* the wrong forces won the war. This is a truth that Mr. Rosenblatt will not face squarely; indeed, as he glosses over the distinctions between war, terrorism, and institutionalized genocide, he ducks many other issues that adults who care about children and their future must confront.

It is not that Mr. Rosenblatt restricts himself to depicting the children he meets and interviews. Far from it. In long, diffuse divagations about his own life, Shakespeare and Homer, his photographers, and the nature of man and history, he displays the skill of a capable essayist and the ideological evasiveness of a liberal journalist. A pacifist by temperament, he only reluctantly comes to suppose that perhaps war is a normal event, not a historical aberration. But in finally blaming war on human nature and choice in general, he avoids the more pertinent question of which contemporary ideologies are worth fighting for and which must be opposed by force, if necessary. To compare the pain of Palestinian children with that of Israeli children, as though all causes of children's pain had the same philosophic significance, is misleading. The fact, easily deduced even from the fragmented data Mr. Rosenblatt offers, is that the consequences of a Palestinian military triumph would be worse than those of continued hostilities or than those of a settlement favorable to Israel. Palestinians who chant, and teach their offspring to chant, slogans not unlike those now heard in Khomeini's Iran would likely create a state monstrously dehumanizing for both adults and children, a state far inferior to Israel's pluralistic democracy. Nor can ideology be ignored when considering the tragedy of Southeast Asia. Pol Pot's incredible brutality during a time of "peace" is not adequately explained by Mr. Rosenblatt's allusion to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness;* unlike Kurtz, Pol Pot was guided by something more concrete than wildly romantic notions of bringing enlightenment to benighted people. Like his forerunner Stalin, he adhered to a communist credo whose implementation makes mere war seem paradisiacal by

comparison. Though terrible, the picture Rosenblatt includes of a Palestinian teenager with brain damage caused by an Israeli bomb is finally less depressing than the Cambodian children's description of a communist world in which no one's brain may even formulate—to say nothing of acting on—a humane thought. (BC) □

Of Fossils and Fundamentalists

***Science and Creationism;* Edited by Ashley Montagu;** Oxford University Press; New York.

As dedicated anticommunists and tireless advocates of traditional morality, Christian fundamentalists have done much to preserve freedom and decency in America at a time when mainline and liberal congregations are drifting dangerously into ethical anarchy and leftist utopianism. Nonetheless, at times their zeal outruns their wisdom, and the results are embarrassing to those who share many of their convictions. The "Scopes II Trial" over the Arkansas law requiring the teaching of creationism in the public schools was such an embarrassment.

Every sensible observer agrees with fundamentalists that the expulsion of religion and morality from the public schools has left a spiritual vacuum filled by crime, drug abuse, and promiscuity. But the displaced values were never scientific in the first place, so the attempt to reintroduce them through the science classroom was foredoomed. Predictably, the law merely provided the ACLU with an opportunity to humiliate well-meaning religionists publicly by exposing the technical ineptness of their arguments and the disingenuity of their tactics. Their defeat, moreover, also occasioned books like *Science and Creationism* in which scholarly contributors demolish the creationists' credibility as scientists while largely evading the critical *non*scientific questions that the devout should be raising concerning our declining schools and the culture that supports them.

The truth is that although only humans do science, science itself can tell us almost nothing

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about what it means to be human. With bigoted arrogance, some of these essayists implausibly posit that the muteness of science on metaphysical issues constitutes an objective proof for materialistic naturalism. Fortunately, a few of the contributors, more honest and humble in victory, concede that as an explanation of the *hows* of life, science can say nothing about the *whys*, not necessarily because there are none, but rather because such questions "transcend the limitations of [science's] epistemological field." Indeed, a philosopher of science who testified against the creationists expresses his relief that no one pressed him on how he intuits "moral values as objective realities," since he has no idea "what that means."

The writers of Scripture knew what objective moral values meant, but through the Holy Ghost, not through science: they left lesser mortals to cultivate that narrow epistemological field. The question then is, Why are the fundamentalists, who quote these writers so frequently, now shamelessly yoking Moses and Peter to the scientific plow? Why, for instance, is Peter's insight that "a day with God is as a thousand years with man" not openly proclaimed as a *religious* revelation of the relationship between the eternal God and temporal man instead of surreptitiously advanced through distorted geological data as a scientific formula for calculating the age of the earth? A partial explanation is suggested by a perceptive contributor who notes that the fundamentalist hermenuetic principle "literal where possible" is "not derived from the Bible itself, but from some alien philosophical sources," specifically from Enlightenment Baconianism. The troubling implication of this critique is that in their literalist preservation of the words of Scripture, fundamentalists have no access to or do not trust the Spirit who inspired those words. Fundamentalism thus apparently abandons the most important of fundamentals. Hence, the devious attempt to transform Scripture into an alternative science is actually an awkward capitulation to the scientistic spirit of the age and a mute confession that those so involved lack something animating those who openly testify of their religion *as* religion, revelation from God, not discovery of man. With justice, fundamentalists apply to our time Hosea's lament, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." But if they suppose that the spiritual knowledge necessary to forestall destruction can or should be enclosed in a science textbook, then, to quote Isaiah: "The vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed." (BC) □

Perceptibles

Michael Novak: *Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age;* Thomas Nelson; Nashville, TN.

Demands for a nuclear freeze are frequent these days, in the halls of Congress, in university classrooms, in the streets, and in churches. In particular, the American Catholic Bishops' pastoral Letter on War and Peace, with its call for a "halt" to the production and deployment of nuclear weaponry, has received wide attention. In this collection of intelligent essays, Michael Novak, himself a Catholic, examines that document in its historical, ecclesiastical, and political context. He reveals that from 1968 to 1982, the United States *did* freeze its nuclear-weapons manufacture, producing not a single new delivery system for missiles and no new strategic bombers during that 14-year period. During this same time, the Soviets built up their nuclear forces relentlessly, surpassing the U.S. in virtually every category, especially in the European theater. The call for a freeze now, at a time when America is belatedly trying to rectify this imbalance, can only mean that the grey matter of many Westerners, including that beneath many miters, is in permafrost. □

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Michael D. Aeschliman: *The Restitution of Man: C. S. Lewis and the Case Against Scientism;* William B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, MI.

While remarkable efforts have helped bring such creatures as the sandhill crane and the American alligator back from the edge of extinction, far too little has been done to save a more important endangered species: man. Considered simply as a biological organism, Homo sapiens appear to be flourishing, with more than 4 billion specimens to be found on earth. But precisely because mankind is now often considered merely scientifically and not philosophically, morally, or religiously, man is ceasing to *be* man. Forty years ago, in *The Abolition of Man,* Christian apologist and literary critic C. S. Lewis warned that the triumph of scientism over traditional metaphysics could only give us "men without

chests," arbitrary, inhuman, and partial men. Because Lewis's book has found tens of thousands of readers, including perceptive analysts like Michael Aeschliman, there is some reason to hope that his warning was heeded. If so, we may anticipate future evidence of man's survival to take forms more meaningful than wildlife photos in *National Geographic.* □

Waste of Money

Psycho-Babble

Judith Rossner: *August;* Houghton Mifflin; Boston.

by Keith Bower

'A woman who writes well never writes much.'
—Max Beerbohm, *Ouida*

Chapter 10 in Judith Rossner's latest novel begins: "In her first months with Dr. Shinefeld that September, Dawn was cheerful. . . ." This curious handling of time isn't on a par with Rossner's confusion of the Immaculate Conception with the Virgin Birth in *Looking for Mr. Goodbar,* but it does show that Rossner is as perceptive as ever. The book is mostly the transcript of young Dawn Henley's psychiatric sessions with Dr. Lulu Shinefeld. And it reads, or rather sprawls, like a transcript, anacoluthons abounding, with dodges and

Mr. Bower is senior editor of The Hillsdale Review.

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asides into obscure, incomprehensible mutterings.

Looking for Mr. Goodbar was tolerable—at best— because it had a plot, and a unique one at that. You knew Terry Dunn was going to end up murdered, even if you hadn't seen the movie first. A murdered main character usually compels some sentiment and serious consideration. The plot did wonders for what turned out to be a merely pathetic character. But *August* lacks any device that can engender concern for the protagonist, and ranting, quirky histrionics do not fill the gap.

Dawn starts seeing Dr. Lulu after a car accident, which was the result of self-destructive urges after a disastrous affair with her previous psychotherapist. She has recently had an abortion that goes by without comment other than to announce the fact. Later, Rossner has Dawn exhibit some anger over the fact that she was exploited by the boyfriend in this act of murder, but there is no moral dimension to the book, and abortion serves Rossner only as the gimbals on which she hangs the only good metaphor in her writings so far, "she threw herself onto the bed and curled up on her side like a fetus someone was trying to abort."

Dawn Henley is a Freudian bonanza. Her artistic mother committed suicide when she was six months old. Her artistically inclined, homosexual father took care of her for a while. One day he and his lover go off for a jaunt on the yacht, leaving the six-month-old to be checked on by a 10-year-old neighbor boy. A squall comes up, drowning the father. The neighbor boy does not remember until the next day that the Henley infant is alone in the beach house. Naturally, Dawn thereafter is repelled by vomit and feces (both of which covered her when she was found in a state of shock the next day).

This could be a possibility for a TV show, as evidenced by Rossner's infuriating habit of telegraphing the solutions to her Freudian puzzle, as if she were afraid the reader won't follow the clues unassisted. But TV standards are still too high. When Dawn regurgitates in Dr. Lulu's office (literally, for a change) and then exhibits a morbid phobia of any emotional subject that will make her choke and possibly repeat the indiscretion, one is initially appreciative of her good manners, then, after being reminded two or three times, suspects there is a key to her past in this. But by the time of the flash-

back to Baby Dawn rolling around in her excretions, the element of discovery is gone. All that remains is unpleasantness, and meaninglessness, which perhaps is Rossner's point. She wouldn't be the first author to embrace this self-contradicting raison d'être.

Dawn also has a fear of being abandoned by loved ones, fear of desertion being a basic component of all Rossner heroines. Dawn's "parents," a lesbian aunt and her bisexual lover, raise her in a small Vermont town, which amounts to a dream scenario straight from the White House Conference on Families about children raised in "alternative families." (The traditional family in Rossner's books fares rather poorly, too.) Naturally, then, Dawn depends a lot on her psychiatrists for emotional support. The title of the novel comes from Dawn's special terror of August, the month that Manhattan psychiatrists take off for Fire Island and points east, stranding their patients in a monstrous, five-borough day-care center.

Looking for Mr. Goodbar had, at its heart, some moral conflict. Terry Dunn's world was morally schizophrenic, drawn between a nauseating normality that was still identifiably "clean" and the hellish assuagements of concupiscence. But *Emmeline* and *August* are merely well-researched diatribes about the ambiguous status of women in society contrasted with their personal yearnings for dignity. And where *Emmeline* was Upton Sinclair wed to Barbara Cartland, *August* is Freud cohabiting with Erica Jong. Whatever "choices" Rossner's characters make, they are never moral ones, but simply assertions of will that are either suppressed by the dominant male or triumphal in the way a child strides off from home with a bundle on a stick. □

Apocalypse Right Now?

Christopher Hyde: ***The Tenth Crusade;*** Houghton Mifflin; Boston.

The book of Scripture generally known to Catholics as the Apocalypse and to Protestants as Revelation has long posed difficult problems for most Christians. Filled with fantastic monsters, cryptic references, and scenes of cataclysmic destruction, suffering, and judgment, this segment of the canon provoked decades

of debate in the early Church over its validity before finally being accepted as authentic. For liberals who don't take much time now to contemplate John's awe-inspiring vision—or any other part of the Bible—Christopher Hyde has written a new Apocalypse sure to win their approval, one that will take its place in their neo-Bible right next to the sacred texts of the Four neo-Evangelists, Vidal, Doctorow, Vonnegut, and Hawkes, and of the ready-to-wear Apostle Mailer. For though Mr. Hyde the novelist (soon to be St. Hyde the Revelator) offers the usual disclaimer as to the ficticiousness of his characters and events, he is clearly offering a book of dire prophecy; hence, publisher's flack's warning that this brutal tale's "most chilling aspect is its imminent likelihood." Very little mystery surrounds the loathsome beasts in this book: they are Bible-toting paramilitary fanatics who infiltrate the government and violently terrorize all those not dead set against "the decadence of America," "the liberal-intellectual minority," and "socialism, communism, homosexuality, judaism, free sex, pornography, abortion, and any kind of sin." John's horrid creatures challenged the spirit and imagination more deeply than these cardboard lunatics, but the intended audience will nonetheless break into rapturous hosannas over them because of the not-so-subtle linkage to the New Right, conservatism, neoconservatism, Jerry Falwell, born-again fundamentalism, and Ronald Reagan. Illuminated manuscripts of the Antichrist with the mystic inscription RR cannot be far behind.

Two features of the ancient Apocalypse not imitated by Mr. Hyde are the New Jerusalem and the fruit of the Tree of Life. But then, his redeemed soul will probably settle for Harvard Square and royalty checks from Houghton Mifflin. (BC) □

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Grave Robbing

Thomas T. Noguchi with Joseph DiMona: *Coroner;* Simon & Schuster; New York.

The American lust for personalities—for people who have been expanded all out of proportion like an irradiated character in a cheap science fiction movie because they happen to have a pretty smile, a sense of humor, or similar characteristics that are ignored when manifest on or in lesser beings—knows no bounds. Teenagers are often chided for their juvenile interests in what rock singers eat, drive, and dream about; those doing the scolding then turn away to watch celebrity talk shows or to read the latest "intimate biography." Presumably, some of the young people will grow out of their desire to know what Ozzy Osbourne is like at home; the danger is that they will develop into an adult form that makes *Mommie Dearest* both a bestseller and a feature film.

Initially, the public persona of the personality was enough; the screen image, which was tastefully maintained in off-camera appearances, sated appetites. Then, almost at the same time that reporters started babbling about "the public's right to know," as if they are the designated stewards of what is to be deemed "knowledge," private lives of public people had to be opened up: efforts of the paparazzi became Platonic ideals. Some children are fascinated by what they discover after overturning a rotting log; older versions feel the same warped delight in discovering, say, that the man who always plays a steady, avuncular character has a drinking problem and can never satisfy his wife: the observers are more sluglike than the observed.

Now, Thomas T. Noguchi, M.D., has taken things one step further: into the grave. The former "Coroner to the Stars"—dismissed because even in Hollywood, some people recognize the existence of civilized norms—turns cadaver into cold cash: ashes to ashes, dust to dust, Noguchi to an "apartment in Marina Del Ray, overlooking the ocean." No cult of ghoulish 19th-century romantics went as far as Noguchi; no sleazy movie about chainsaws, Halloween masks, and terrorized victims—no matter how many gallons of pig's blood are strewn about—has gone so low. A practitioner of what he terms "the total-investigative approach," which sounds like he's vying for a job on *60 Minutes,* Noguchi leads a Cook's tour through what should be closed crypts. From Monroe to Joplin, Holden to Belushi, if they're hot but stiff, he's got them covered. Almost more disgusting than his pandering to the tastes of the perverse is the fact that *Good Housekeeping* magazine bought the first serial rights to the book: cookies, crafts, and corpses all get the seal of approval for the modern American woman. □

Lost in the Bunghouse

Charles B. Harris: *Passionate Virtuosity: The Fiction of John Barth;* University of Illinois Press; Urbana.

Words, modern semioticians tirelessly remind us, have no inherent connection to the things, or "percepts," to which they point. Nevertheless, great writers always employ words in the confidence that the meaning of their texts is not merely the pseudomeaning of arbitrary linguistic artifice but rather is a reflection of discoverable relationships actually inhering in the human condition that they explore in their work. Creative artists, it's true, do use words to conjure into being particular incidents and personages which in fact have never existed, but in art worthy of the name, imaginary episodes serve not simply to stimulate the reader's fantasy but to confront us with enduring verities. Leo Tolstoy thus spoke for every admirable writer when he wrote at the end of *Sevastopol Sketches:* "The hero of my story, whom I love with all the strength of my soul, whom I have tried to reproduce in all his beauty and who always was, is, and will be beautiful, is truth."

Tolstoy's declaration is, like everything else, incomprehensible to a postmodern novelist like John Barth, who believes that the universe has no meaningful center and therefore no inherent truths. For him, all order, including art, is a willful projection onto unbounded chaos and so ultimately a lie. Nonetheless, Mr. Barth has a passion for telling such lies, generously loaded with random sex, cute anagrams, side-show scatology, penny-ante nihilism, and ever-so-precious experimentation. For his innovative flim-flamming, he has received the plaudits of numerous well-placed admirers, including Charles Harris, who thinks the self-consciousness and energy of Barth's lying makes his work comparable to that of Borges and Camus. When recently asked about the comparison, Borges immediately replied: "We have little in common." Hence, now we have a reputable university press publishing invidious lies about a self-proclaimed liar and genuine artists. We assume that Illinois State University, where Dr. Harris serves as English Department chairman, is expanding its curriculum to include such Barthian courses as Advanced Mendacity 301 and Published Paltering 495. (BC) □

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The Fog Effect

***Scarface;* Directed by Brian De Palma; Written by Oliver Stone; Universal.**

by Stephen Macaulay

One of the consequences of the medium of mass communication is that they have a tendency to deaden people's sensitivities to the existences of good and evil and so leave them perceiving just grey areas that take an all-important role as people drift into moral and spiritual ambivalence. Consult the front page of a newspaper: reports about the deaths of a large number of persons, train derailments, natural catastrophes, diplomatic talks aimed at reducing the possibility of nuclear war, the weather, and about how the local sports team did: death, disaster, and danger are diminished by the climate and games. Television news broadcasts include the same topics; commercial messages may seem to break the stream —and perhaps once did—but now are a part of it, so that political turmoil is equal to an upset stomach. Popular magazines like *People* put the efforts of a Mother Teresa on the same level as the slinkiness of a soap-opera star; tabloids like the *National Enquirer* put cancer research on par with U.F.O. sightings. The effect is a cooling down that leads people to tolerate, accept, or become indifferent to what would, in another time, be considered outrageous. Sometimes, of course, people react from this escape from real things. Often, their efforts are gross. During the 19th century, for example, the naturalist movement in literature evolved, in part, in response to what some considered to be the spurious attitude of retreat manifest by those ranging from the Romantic poets to the Flaubert of *Salammbô.* "This is the world: dirt and squalor," many of the naturalists insisted, and one of the reasons why their work is more like journalism than art is because they were seeing *only* filth and despair, which is merely the obverse of that which their foes were singing about.

Today, drugs, as a subject of discourse, are treated in a bland, off-handed manner. Heroin is one of the few illegal substances that evokes any heat, yet it is rarely brought up. Too many have become indifferent to marijuana. Whereas it was once a point of contention in public forums, it is now wimpishly accepted as a part of the landscape. Cocaine is regularly designated a "recreational drug," as if it has some characteristics that make it little different from jogging or skittles. Cocaine is—in general, not medical use —a chemical that causes a horrible disease. It must be opposed on all levels: political, legal, economic, cultural. Director Brian De Palma attempts to address the last-named in his *Scarface.* Clearly, De Palma is against cocaine. For him, it is not a benign substance that is as chic as a bowl of macademia nuts. He fights his battle through naturalistic techniques, which may not be as effective as other means, but which indicate that he has a certain morality—albeit a primitive one—which is lacking in many of the creations of several contemporary writers and filmmakers. A telling reaction is that of novelists Kurt Vonnegut and John Irving. They reportedly walked out during a screening of the film, Vonnegut after some 15 minutes of the nearly three-hour production. Why? Could it be that their sensitivities were bruised? That sounds good, given the raw horror of the film, but doesn't hold. Vonnegut's latest novel, *Deadeye Dick,* is centered on the fatal shooting of a pregnant woman: it's an accident, the story goes. Irving, in *The World According to Garp,* renders one of the most disgusting scenes in fiction: the ocular impalement of a child on the threaded end of an automobile gear shift. Another accident. Both can throw up their hands and exclaim, as Vonnegut often does, "So it goes."

Cocaine use is no accident; the destructive effects are a certainty once an individual makes a choice to take that first "toot"—then another and another and another. According to a news report, some five million Americans use cocaine; up to 20% of them are hooked. It's an expensive drug: one gram can cost $150 or more; a gram is good for only a quick night out. The cocaine trade, consequently, is a multibillion-dollar-a-year industry, one bigger than the recording and film industries combined. Those involved in the business are not small-time crooks who are hustling a few bucks. Politicians and legal authorities undoubtedly receive bribes to smooth the skids for the smugglers and distributors. Bankers must be employed to launder the vast quantities of money. Investment operatives are necessary to hide the enormous income that results from the trade in death. But who talks about cocaine?

De Palma dedicates *Scarface* to Howard Hawks and Ben Hecht, the two men responsible for the 1932 movie of the same name. There are a few "paraphrased" passages in De Palma's film that acknowledge the original. Overall, the title and the nods are trifles. In the history of

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cinema, there has been a tendency to mollify the evilness of villains, to "humanize" them, some of the so-called enlightened breed might say. For example, *The Godfather* films make the viewer feel for certain members of the Corleone family: they may be murderous criminals, but they are human beings, too. De Palma's characters—one and all—are totally despicable. They evoke no empathy, only disgust. Whereas people have shown a tendency to emulate screen figures (e.g., become a Brando-style punk after *The Wild One;* braid one's locks a la *10*), it's unimaginable that any normal, decent, rudimentarily civilized Homo sapiens would want to figure him or herself on the manner of those in *Scarface*—there's no accounting for those bizarre individuals who aspire to become scum.

The problem with *Scarface* is that it is a very intense film that achieves its intensity through blood, brutality, and obscenity. Perhaps De Palma's goal was an impossible one. That is, he was unable to rely on characters as a means through which he could create anything nearing tragedy because tragic figures must, at some point in the drama, be appealing. His subjects are wicked, vile. As he apparently wanted to communicate the *fact* that cocaine is a present, pervasive, malevolent force that is permeating society at *all* levels and which requires, therefore, a concerted effort of opposition by *all* people, he was unable to introduce a Lone Ranger or a Dirty Harry to clean up the mess. The corruption is real, outside of the theater, he insists. Unfortunately, in all of his zealousness he ignores catharsis of any type and even a conclusion, so *Scarface* fails as art, as much of the work of the 19th-century naturalists does. But as an antenna that picks up ambient signals and an amplifier that broadcasts a warning, De Palma is much more effective than those who choose to turn their backs on the reality, as Vonnegut and Irving do, and those who feel comfortable in the cool, grey fog. □

Update

***Rear Window;* Directed by Alfred Hitchcock; Written by John Michael Hayes; based on a story by Cornell Woolrich; Universal.**

To the Americans who emerged from the 1960's and 70's, Hitchcock's little masterpiece must look highly suspect. Without its cultural patina, it would be immediately dragged before the court of opinion of the amalgamated absurdists that controls and conditions our contemporary social impulses. Its moral dialectics would be declared a prelude to Orwell's vision of Big Brother. Imagine: there once was a time—a mere 30 years ago—when a nice, clean, private murder couldn't be committed without observation by some law-and-order fanatic with a telephoto lens. Wouldn't James Stewart's method of gathering evidence be declared an invasion of privacy and an attempt to interfere with the right of human self-realization to which every murderer is entitled? Wouldn't Raymond Burr's case result in a mistrial? Why is this man, Stewart, making so much fuss about one homicide without knowing anything "relevant" about the victim and her murderer, when today even a scream of a woman raped in a street rarely induces anyone to pick up the phone and alert the police? And weren't we taught that the 1950's were "Victorian" and have to be contemptuously dismissed as "repressive"? How, then, can we account for the fact that the characters portrayed by Stewart and Ms. Grace Kelly seem to enjoy a relationship that is quite healthy, by "our" standards, and much more reasonable than our time's perfunctory sexual calisthenics?

The mere fact that the movie is staged in a mock, cute Greenwich Village setting, similar to that of a Broadway musical, should somehow reverberate in the *Village Voice's* headquarters. We wonder what that organ's estimation of a 1983 release embodying the general ideas of *Rear Window* would be. □

Where Is Thy Point?

***Terms of Endearment;* Directed and Written by James L. Bridges; Based on a novel by Larry McMurtry; Paramount.**

The portrayal of human emotions, interactions, and feelings is something that should be regularly featured in movies, though its absence is more notable. Instead, viewers are shown human dancing, dead-human attacking, and other unsubtle scenes. Movies that purportedly take sensitivities into account usually have the texture and richness of corrugated cardboard. Thus, *Terms of Endearment,* which supposedly deals with the concepts of interest, would presumably be a film that evokes hope for Hollywood. Could it possibly be that James L. Bridges, the man who helped make *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* a fixture of Saturday night TV viewing (remember the reports of weeping about the final episode?) and *Taxi* one of the few shows that was able to temporarily survive by jumping networks (remember the reports of indignant letters to ABC?), worked some magic? In a word: no. *Terms of Endearment* would be more accurately titled *List of Misfortunes.* One witnesses: a neurotic mother; the night after the funeral of a father; an ill-starred marriage; an ex-astronaut gone to seed; the despair of a banker in Iowa; a child who is tormented by his parents' tendency to address each other in sexual grunts or multidecibel shouts; marital infidelity (two counts); jaded New York City socialites. A commercial for a headache remedy says, "Life got tough, so we got tougher." As if the scenario wasn't tough enough, Bridges, working with Larry McMurtry's novel, throws in a series of scenes straight out of *Love Story* (1970): the young mother of three and adulterous wife (she and the banker sulked together) of a disloyal husband (see, life has gotten tougher—at least the characters in *Love Story* are

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true to each other) dies of cancer. The consequences: the mother is still-neurotic, though she gains custody of the three children; the ex-astronaut *may* flourish with the neurotic mother (two peas in a pod, so to speak); the banker, presumably continues unchanged; the son is surly; New York never changes. The widower, as far as I can determine, is the only one who will gain: not only is he free of the kids, but he doesn't have to worry about getting a divorce. There is no catharsis for the viewer, just a lot of soggy Kleenex tissues on the theater floor. Certainly, watching the cancer victim is a sad experience. But at the end of more than two hours, a question about the entire production emerges: So what? It seems as if Bridges doesn't have an answer; the movie simply ends like a skit in an actors' class: poses are dropped and the students go back to normal life. The only difference in this case is that the film has credits. (SM) □

Music

Like a Bad Penny...

Back in the mid-1960's, Roger Daltrey, lead singer of The Who, the group that was then best known for smashing up its equipment, sneered, as only a cocky teenager can, "I hope I die before I get old." Now far on the far side of that great divide known as age 30, Mr. Daltrey, among other activities, appears in ads for wrist watches that would collectively bankrupt any group of Mods or Rockers that tried to buy one. Mick Jagger, who had had a stint at the London School of Economics, was more shrewd in those heady days of yore. The skinny punk (as in petty hoodlum) moaned in his thankfully inimitable manner, "Time is on my side—yes it is!" At least the boy was more honest than young Daltrey. The Rolling Stones have been too much with us for 20 years; there are no signs that they will go away. Death, defection, drugs, detention—nothing has stopped them. Mr. Jagger, who has now hit 40, seems to have become Old Man River: he just keeps rolling along.

The image of The Rolling Stones has always been a seminegative one: they deliberately cultivated ruthlessness. They are not unlike a gang of bad boys who, after snatching a candy bar from the shelf of an infirm confectioner's shop, think themselves to be Al Capones. However, people believed that that pose was reality, and so it has been effective. When a man was killed, reportedly by one or more members of a motorcycle club called the "Hell's Angels," while the Stones performed a pretentious ditty titled "Sympathy for the Devil" on a stage at Altamont raceway, the eyes grew wide on both the lovers and haters of the mobile geology: "Gee whiz, maybe they really are demons." Parapsychology aside, the fact of the matter is that The Rolling Stones were, and are, inept musicians who had, and have, to rely on all manner of nonmusical trappings to draw attention away from their rudimentarily organized noise and to themselves. Thus, they've insulted supporters of a civil polity with SDSesque numbers like "Street Fighting Man"; women with their promotional campaign for the *Black and Blue* album, which included a billboard touting bondage, and with an early tune called "Under My Thumb," which was refurbished for their 1981 farewell tour (one only wishes that it was goodbye); and the world at large with their logo, which consists of Jagger-like liver lips with a tongue protruding, a sign of lumpishness that's popular with preschoolers. What have they received in consequence for their crudity? Wealth, fame, magazine covers, platinum records, newspaper coverage, immediate access to Studio 54 when people wanted to go there, fans, groupies, imitators, and, most unfortunately, influence. Like it or not, any cultural study of the West that concentrates on the past 20 years will have to give more than a footnote to the group of professional amateurs, for the zillions of records, T-shirts, concert tickets, posters, buttons, bumperstickers, badges, photographs, etc. have made a rather large mark on the cultural landscape, one more obvious than the results of sodium dioxide or PCB's but no less noxious.

But what's Mr. Jagger to do when the Spandex isn't as appealing on him as it is on a younger, lithe woman performer like Pat Benatar, who is more nimble and supple than he ever was when it comes to the bump and grind and who—showing no greater talent—almost imitates his raucous style, is selling *beaucoup* albums? And there is another variable in her favor: she can sing-shout, as she does on a recent release from *Live from Earth* (Chrysalis), "We are young!" and get away with it; if Mr. Jagger were to try, no amount of strutting his stuff could hold back the howls. What can Mr. Jagger do when the avid viewers of MTV start thinking that makeup really looks better on a Linda Ronstadt than on his wrinkled visage? Mr. Jagger and his cohorts, in the face of such challenges, have taken refuge in arteriosclerosis. While musicians like Paul McCartney—who realize that if you can't beat it you must join Michael Jackson—have adapted, The Rolling Stones have regressed. That is, they have released what is supposed to be a "new" album, *Undercover* (Rolling Stones Records), yet although the package is different and the titles of the cuts haven't been seen before, one feels a curious déjà vu while both looking at the album and listening to the compositions. The group climbed out of one hole and then went

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back into it. For example, the cover of the *Sticky Fingers* album shows a life-sized photo of the top quarter of an average-sized pair of Levis. A bona fide zipper was placed on the fly. Peek and you see underwear. Those who are interested in such things must be in ecstasy when they visit the clothing department of their local K-Mart. The jacket of *Undercover* shows a less than life-sized pinup girl who has stickers covering her strategic areas. Obviously, the bad boys still aim to appeal to a truly sophisticated class of record-buying cretins. The music itself, if the reggae sound that they imported in the late 70's is overlistened, is pure Stone circa 1969: the tune "All the Way Down," for example, doesn't merely use riffs from "Jumping Jack Flash," one of their biggest hits, but is essentially based on it. Those who buy oldie-but-goodie packages from television ads ("Album! Eight-track! or Cassette!") will find this approach most appealing, and not only is the album full of recycled Stones sounds, but listeners can try to detect other borrowings (a clue: a Bob Seger number from 1972 can be found), which is more fun than the old pastime of playing Beatle albums backwards so as to determine whether or not Paul is dead. Those who love to hate the Stones won't be disappointed either: "Tie You Up (The Pain of Love)" and "Pretty Beat Up" should make those who were bitter about "Under My Thumb" apoplectic—but you can be sure that the distaff side will buy more than its fair share of *Undercover*.

The politics haven't changed, though "Street Fighting Man" is now looking south of the border—and not as Jay and the Americans did. The Rolling Stones exert a disturbing amount of influence on young minds (both those being formed and those housed in fully mature bodies); the niche that they've hacked out for themselves is a comfortable one that they obviously plan to hold on to. Their put-on chic politics, bad taste, and bid for continued relevance are all evident on *Undercover's* big number, "Under Cover of the Night." The lyrics, mumbled over a frenetic bass line and a

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rat-a-tat drum, are a paean to Latin American revolutionaries, say the Sandinistas. As MTV (which permits musicians to play dress-up and lip-sync) is a potent force in the marketplace and as the characters shown on it tend to be younger, prettier, uglier, weirder, more ill-mannered, more talented, less talented, and/or on the whole *different* than the Stones, the boys had to shore up their crumbling images. So they made a costly video for "Under Cover of the Night" which, if nothing else, indicates that the radical rock of the 1960's hasn't been completely buried; the production is a miniature combination of those two cinematic hails to the rebels, *Missing* and *Under Fire.* It is aimed directly at teenagers. In the piece (which was banned by the BBC) Mr. Jagger gets to wear a cheap false mustache in an otherwise realistic production (its falseness seems to imply, "Hey, kids, I'm really too young to grow a real one—just like you!") and the cadaverous Keith Richards gets to put on a skull-faced Halloween mask (it's difficult to tell which face is real: drug abuse takes a toll); on the whole, the message is that there's a great deal of fun and excitement involved in being an urban guerrilla today, just as it was in the late 60's. Such pseudoradical rancidity knows no bounds and, as evidenced by the Stones, has longevity. (SM) □

Space Invaders

While awaiting the appearance of the cinematic *The Right Stuff,* Brian Eno's vinyl *Apollo: Atmospheres & Soundtracks* (Editions EG) emerged, so we figured that it would be a more-than-adequate substitute and quite possibly the *real* stuff. That is, the album cover shows the surface of the moon, in varying shades of living brown, as photographed by the Apollo 14 astronauts. Filmmaker Al Reinhart, who composed a film with NASA's cooperation and without actors (just the original footage), had asked for Brian Eno's musical cooperation. While those two signs are suggestive, they are minor as compared to the visible and audible existence of composer and musician Mr. Eno—and the masculine form is used because no ambiguous title has been developed, though Umm would be suitable. Mr. Eno appears to be more extraterrestrial than E. T. He has done extensive work with Robert Fripp—the man who has capitalized on tape-loop delays and electronic/guitar technology—and with him produced compositions including the appropriately titled "Wind on Water," "Water on Wind," and the unhummable "An Index of Metals" (all on *Evening Star;* Editions EG). He has also collaborated with the similarly curious Umm David Bowie.

Mr. Eno himself is no slouch, having produced several albums of what can be best described as "mood music" for specific locations, such as airports. Many of his compositions resemble white noise or the sounds of hump-backed whales. Thus, Mr. Eno lost in space is somehow appropriate, for, *Star Wars* notwithstanding, space is a fairly quiet place, and no eardrums—that we know about—are out there to reverberate, anyway. Mr. Eno collaborates with Daniel Lanois and Roger Eno (small world) on *Apollo.* He does not disappoint on his mission to the moon—at least not in the context of Brian Eno. The guitars and various keyboard instruments modestly rise to a whoosing crescendo on side one's "An Ending (Ascent)," then the three musicians go cruising along, helped by a steel guitar, of all things. Mr. Eno is as shameless as he is eclectic. While the musical texture is appropriately post-ethereal, it is so in a secular sense, being basically an index of muted electronics, which makes us wonder whether Mr. Eno isn't making music so much as merely fiddling with dials. (SM) □

Organized Sound

***The New Oxford Companion to Music* (two volumes); Edited by Denis Arnold; Oxford University Press; New York.**

When the subject turns to ancient art, those conversing usually bring up the cave paintings in France; these, the claim typically goes, are the first evidences of man's artistic bent. In a sense, this is true: the paintings are *evidence,* tangible objects with spatial form, things that can be sensed long after their creators are dust. What is less often figured is the fact that man was probably jodeling to his heart's content in that vast auditorium bounded only by the heaven and the horizon long before it occurred to him to pick up a stick with which to doodle in the dirt. Music has long been with us—perhaps it has always been around: isn't it likely that a cave woman sang to the infant that she held to her breast? History, of course, begins with evidence, and in the case of music, it starts in Sumer around 3000 B.C. Since then, the proliferation of songs, instruments, musicians, forms, terms, performers, etc. has been astonishing. Pythagoras and his colleagues developed the concept of the Music of the Spheres. It puts forth the idea that there is a harmonious relationship in the universe, one among the bodies in the firmament: music is everywhere. While the specific concept has been largely discarded, in a metaphoric sense it remains true: our daily lives are permeated with music, Muzak, and the random minifugues that flit through our minds.

The Oxford Companion to Music appeared in 1938 under the direction of Percy A. Scholes. Several revisions were made in that initial work. Clearly, in the decades following 1938, the world has opened up, or become smaller, depending upon one's view. The result is that there is an awareness of many more musical traditions that is much broader

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than the one that existed in 1938. Thus, it's not surprising that *The New Oxford Companion to Music* is a two-volume set whereas its predecessor is a single volume. While the *New Oxford Companion* isn't exhaustive in the sense that, say, the *OED* is considered to be, it is nonetheless a marvelously detailed encyclopedia; as general editor Denis Arnold points out, "Those who want more facts must be directed to *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980)"—which consists of 20 volumes. For most readers, the Oxford set is more than sufficient and to the moment as it ranges from the ancient Mesopotamian lute players to The Police. □

ART

Artless Merchandizing

Kenneth Clark: *The Art of Humanism;* Harper & Row; New York.

by Richard Kostelanetz

A title so grand evokes the image of a book equally grand, which this, alas, is not. *The Art of Humanism* is less about an artistic style or even an age than about five gentlemen: Alberti, Donatello, Uccello, Mantegna, and Botticelli. Indicatively, the book has only five chapters, one apiece on the five figures, and there is neither an introduction nor a conclusion that might support the title. Predominantly close analyses of visual details, these five chapters are best read in conjunction with the numerous, mostly full-page photographic illustrations. Internal evidence (such as "with which some of you may be familiar") suggests that the text began as scripts for Kenneth Clark's traveling slide shows, which were apparently slapped together to make this book whose true title should be, given the subjects, "The Art of ADUMB." Just as there should be truth in advertising, so should book publishers provide truth in titling.

The assumption of the book's title is that these five 15th-century artists epitomize an art we should call "humanistic." However, neither Clark nor his publisher think this a thesis worth proving. Indeed, in the few times Clark uses the epithet or its variants, he usually refers to an intellectual attitude whose opposite is theist. However, Clark's subject is not belief but art; and for all of its usefulness as a platitude, humanism is no more of an aesthetic (or art-historic) category than animalism and vegetism. Whether these five lectures have scholarly value with reference to earlier commentaries on these hot five, I cannot tell; as essays on art, they offer little.

If mislabeling is the first problem of the book, the second problem is Clark's style. In his fawning introduction, John Walker, director emeritus of the National Gallery (U.S.), suggests that "the average reader" will be as "equally spellbound" as he the scholar-curator was. Not so. There is no way that an above-average reader, let alone a professional in an area other than art history, could get through this sample passage, and then, as one test of comprehension, tell someone else about it:

> Once more we are aware of this conflict between a scientific and stylistic approach, a dilemma which does not seem to have troubled Alberti, but which underlies the whole of the *della Pittura* in the same way that a conflict between his realistic Tuscan business philosophy and the teachings of Plato underlies his moral writings. In that event it was the classicising and stylistic part of Alberti's writings, and not his scientific naturalism, which was realized in the painting of the next hundred years.

Indeed, the defect of Walker's collegial introduction is that instead of answering nagging questions about the provenience of these lectures, it is devoted to unctuous promotional blather that is no more acceptable now, after Clark's recent death, than it was before, when Walker wrote.

Clark's writing is not merely witless and undistinguished, it is often inept. "This was perhaps the first time," he writes, "that the men of the Renaissance felt they had excelled that antique culture which both inspired and oppressed them." Excelled? Is this a misprint for "exceeded"? That is possible, though perhaps "transcended" would be more appropriate. Other offensive sentences seem added as concessions to popularization: "Uccello was far from being the Noah's Ark and rocking-horse painter which the superficial have supposed him

Mr. Kostelanetz, an author and a critic, is completing a critique of literary granting in America.

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to be." Not only are Clark's adjectives flippant here but so is his escalation of an adjective for a certain kind of intellectual inadequacy into the putative name of an intellectual class (that, need we say, cannot be found on Earth).

What is the "average reader" to make of passing references such as this about Botticelli's illustrations to Dante? "Since the war the drawings have been in East Berlin (actually about a third of them are on loan in Dahlem)." Unless the reader knows already to what that last term refers, someone other than Clark must tell him or her that Dahlem is the name of a section of West Berlin in which, to extend the allusion, the Dahlem Museum is located. Since Clark does not even say "in the Dahlem," the suspicion is that here he is addressing an audience not of "average readers" but exclusively of professional colleagues who can grasp, without pause, not just the first level of his reference but the second!

Another problem is Clark's arrogance. It results in his making controversial assertions that he implies need not be supported or qualified:

> Throughout history revolutions in art have taken the form of a return to nature against exhausted formulas of picture-making, or an excessive attachment to style for its own sake. All true revolutions are popular and anti-hierarchic, and ultimately popular art is always realistic art. That modern abstract art should be called 'bolshevik' is a comical misnomer; far from being the art of the bolshoi, the many, it is the art of the very few, and in any thorough-going revolution it would be swept away. It could be correctly described as anarchic, contrary to the old laws, and so entirely subjective.

What makes this passage arrogant is that not only obvious objections but critical questions come to mind. If Clark's implicit point is that abstract modernism is not really revolutionary, because it does not fit his putative historical model, then he should say so explicitly in his next sentences which here, however, merely continue an earlier commentary on Alberti. If this book were edited, rather than merely processed, a statement like this would have been challenged and then either explained, corrected, or deleted.

Why was this book published? Why do Kenneth Clark's scholarly, detailed lectures on five 15th-century artists now appear as a trade book? To go after an answer is to uncover a major intellectual scandal of our time—a scandal everyone knows, but few acknowledge—which is, simply, that in deciding which scholarly works to issue today, commercial publishers are less concerned with intellectual value and even editorial accuracy than with the fame of the author. The key that opens their coffers is celebrity, not insight or reputation, which is to say, in this case, that once Clark became famous through a television series, operations like Harper & Row were predisposed to exhume his lecture notes. And naive book reviewers were predisposed to shower any new Kenneth Clark title with perfunctory praise. The cynical assumption is that to be sold in sufficiently remunerative numbers a scholarly book needs a familiar name, a pretentious title, and then an introduction assuring first the publishers, then the reviewers who read only introductions, and finally the bookstore managers that this trade title ought to be accessible to the general public. With so much deceit all along the line, everyone involved should be ashamed.

It should be noted that for all of the publisher's dreams of dollar signs, there was not enough desire to make a book that agreed with the text. One reason why *The Art of Humanism* is cheaper than many other art books available today is that the illustrations are all black and white. This limitation is scarcely noticed until a peculiar painting is credited with "ravishingly beautiful colour," or Clark describes a certain sculpture as "polychrome." In the latter case, the reader wants either to be told what colors are there or to see them in an illustration. In this hasty transition from a slide show to a book, there is neither. On the other hand, in the limitation of the illustrations is perhaps an implicit slight—that Sir Kenneth, for all of his celebrity, was not enough of a sure-fire star to justify the expense of color! (Only Norman Mailer on Marilyn Monroe would deserve that.)

The worst problem plaguing cultural communication today is that in choosing which particular intellectuals and ideas to push through their incomparable distribution systems, commercial book publishers appear to follow the new media more than to lead them. As soon as a writer appears prominently on the tube, too many book publishers rush to scrape (and package) his lint off the screen. And most everyone else involved with the dissemination of culture, from book reviewers to teachers, appear predisposed to follow the wagging tail, exemplifying Harold Rosenberg's classic image of "the herd of independent minds." This abdication of cultural initiative, coupled with an inability to correct the corruptions of cultural communication, is, to be frank, the surest sign of the treason of the supposed intellectuals in our time. □

In the Mail

***The Drama Circle Quarterly Letter*, Winter 1983; The Drama Circle; St. Paul, MN.** Argues against dramatists like Antonin Artaud with the weapon of sociobiology. Fire with fire?

***From Right to Left: An Autobiography* by Frederick Vanderbilt Field; Lawrence Hill & Co.; Westport, CT.** A Fifth Avenue-bred member of the C.P.U.S.A. maintains that it's better to be red than rich. (Yes, it happens in even the best of families.)

***The Adolescent Drug-Sex-Crime Matter: Common Sense About the National Defense* by Sidney Vernon; Rovern Press; Willimantic, CT.** Dr. Vernon maintains that the illegal drug industry should be nationalized. Some think lobotomies cure headaches.

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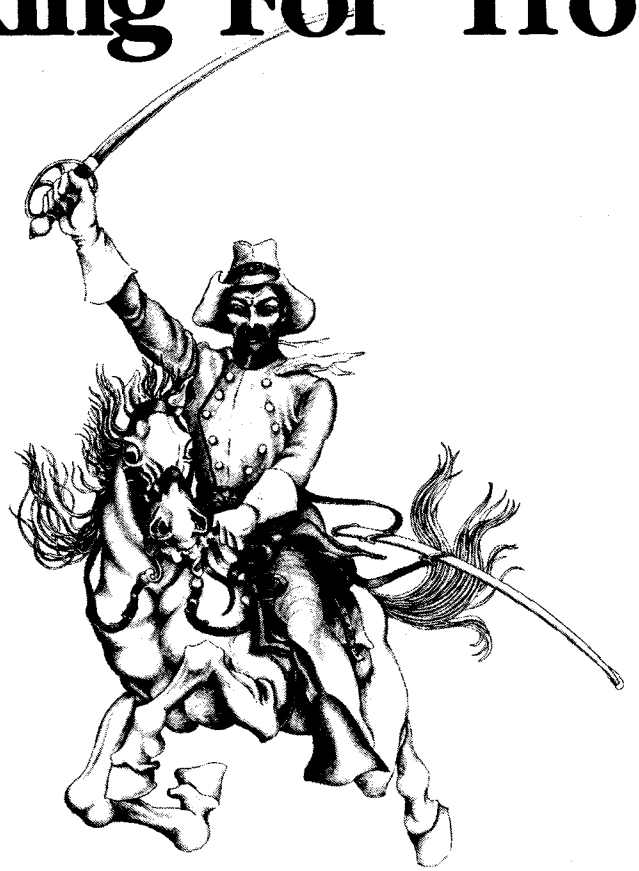
Looking For Trouble?



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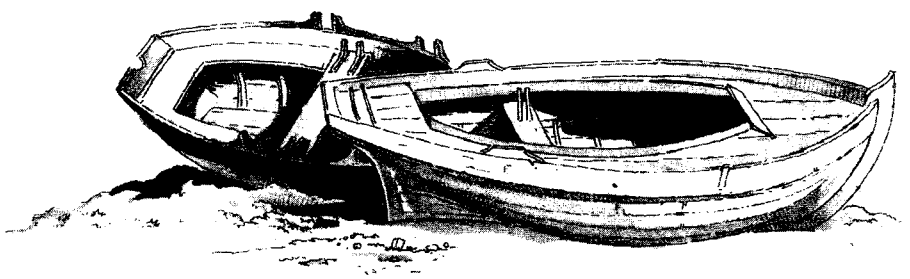
Two Nations?

In 1969, after race riots that shook America, the National Commission on Civil Disorders, or the Kerner Commission, issued a report. The most ominous conclusion of the report stated that if racial divisiveness persists "our nation will be moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal." In the decade-and-a-half since the report was issued, nothing seems to have boosted that gloomy premonition more than the Rev. Jesse Jackson's Damascus episode. Throughout the Vietnam War period, our nation was divided along ideological lines to the extent that the American ultra-liberal and radical left initiated its own foreign policy, through which it openly challenged the official moral and political vision of the war. The end result was the first unmitigated disaster in American history: the predicted domino effect went into full swing; some societies teetered on the verge of genocide, while others went over the brink and experienced the cruelest exterminating subjugation of our time. Our diminished global potential and our consequent woes on the international scene fell upon us so oppressively that the tragic eventuality of a nuclear war became more real than it had been before our defeat in Southeast Asia. What's most important, however, was the destructive feeling, bolstered by history's teachings, that once one part of a society (that which disagrees with its democratically elected government) starts conniving with an enemy and that activity becomes acceptable as a result of moral relativity or laxness of laws (that are supposed to protect our freedom), our national sovereignty is jeopardized to an intolerable degree.

Rev. Jackson did not connive with an enemy, because Syria is not an enemy at war with us. What we witnessed was a surfeit of either deliberate stupidity or not-too-discreetly concealed smartness, both of which bode ill. Let's recall the now familiar stages of Rev. Jackson's excursion. Our liberal, all-distorting media saw in it "a drama": one still remembers the manic gleam in Mr. Rather's eyes when he elaborated on the "suspense" linked to incertitude whether or not the Syrians would let Lt. Goodman go. But there was no drama involved: totalitarian countries do not admit in visitors for negations, only for enacting a priori-contrived scenarios. Syria is, of course, ferociously totalitarian. Therefore, before they issued a visa to Rev. Jackson, the decision had been made: support was going to be given to a strongly adversarial Democratic presidential candidate, a veritable demagogue, a politician with a powerful (if incoherent) leftward push and a record of subservience to Arab causes and interests, and, after all that, a black to boot. There are many throughout the world who dearly wish to throw some sand into the Republican administration's forthcoming campaign; the embarrassing problem of a military captive who's not exactly a prisoner of war, and with whom no one knows exactly what to do, suddenly has become an opportunity to do so. President Assad quickly made up his mind, consulted with the Soviets (one always consults a worldwide enterprise to which one owes some $X-billion for delivery of arms), who reinforced the idea that it makes a lot of sense to stir up the racial antipathies in America.

By now we know that the Syrian government even shouldered the lion's share of Candidate Jackson's expenses, which the good Reverend promised to reimburse, but we won't wait with bated breath for the drafting of the check. All we know is that when Jackson embraced President Assad, whose avuncular smile cannot overcome the intensity of his beady, cruel, mercilessly watchful eyes, Mr. Rather went into another transport of dimwittedness and quoted Assad as saying that he was the only one for Lt. Goodman's release, that he went up against the opinion of all his ministers. In Mr. Rather's media-engineered intellect, this was obvious proof of the Arab leader's independence of mind and courageous pluralism. At that moment, Mr. Rather conveniently forgets that this is the same Arab leader whose political police arbitrarily breaks into his citizens' homes and rapes the women on a whim—not because the citizens are antigovernment (those people were killed off long ago), but because they happen to be appealing women. This is the type of "statesman" that Assad is. When he and the Rev. Jackson smooched in the public eye, Mr. Rather seemed transported with bliss.

All of the media's inane jubilations, analyses, and political projections aside, there are questions that remain to be answered: why did Reverend/Candidate Jackson become a tool, and who wielded it? Our enemies on this planet—and Syria is one of the most implacable of our foes, if only because of our chumminess with you-know-who—want nothing more than our being turned into two nations with two separate foreign policies, a paralyzed entity in which Uncle Jesse fixes things for Uncle Sam's soldiers. Many blacks could conclude that Jackson's maverick approach is the right one, and our enemies will know how to use this new concept, the dangerous alteration of a lawful democratic polity. There are already celebrations under way throughout the country that cast the whole event into



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a symbol of black separatedness, make out of it an autonomous black issue. Asked whether Rev. Jackson would have gone on his "mission" were Lt. Goodman white, a spokesman for Rev. Jackson delivered something which seemed to be his boss's official stand on *this* dilemma: no, he said, for if he had been white, the pressure to free the hostage coming from both the U.S. government and the public would be *so* strong that it would not require his intervention. And plenty of blacks in this country will buy this bald-faced lie, which is both politically lame and primitive, and overlook the fact that the Reagan Administration made strenuous efforts on behalf of Lt. Goodman precisely to show, in the electoral year, that it *cares* about blacks and can cull some dividends for its warm and tender concerns.

Therefore, we must respectfully but firmly disagree with our President who closed the Jackson interlude in the otherwise dull season of political intrigue with an adage: "You do not quarrel with success." We think that one does quarrel with even a glittering accomplishment if one feels that its long-range consequences can be dismal, perhaps nefarious. And with a clean conscience we can assert that the only actor in this "drama" who behaved with admirable composure and dignity was Lt. Goodman who, when meeting Rev. Jackson for the first time, said to the countless journalists who had assembled: "I was informed by the Syrians that someone very important by the name of Jackson was coming to see me, and I wondered who it might be—Reggie Jackson, Michael Jackson? . . ." We wonder why this line was never quoted in our liberal press? □

Ambition . . . Ambition . . .

Can be sung to the *Fiddler on the Roof* tune, wistfully—or with an Irish accent. Sen. Moynihan, once upon a time one of the most clear-thinking personalities in politics and academia, our favorite Democratic intellectual (no oxymoron intended), talks of late like an enfeebled McGovern clone. And his debilitation is most acute and obvious when he discusses foreign policy, a topic upon which he formerly became fascination incarnate. What could be the cause of this sudden infirmity? Does he really wish to be the next Vice-President of the United States? Does he think he can make it there? □

Respectability & Fairness

Professor Carl Sagan is a respectable scientist. At least, that is what the wide range of media outlets, both print and electronic, maintain as they build up his image of an impressive scholar and trustworthy man of thought. He is also a staunch foe of nuclear weapons, a firm, even aggressive, supporter of the nuclear-freeze movement, and a severe critic of the American foreign policy that is based on the concept of a military defense against America's enemies.

In a recent issue of *Parade,* the chief organ of pop liberalism that invades millions of American homes every Sunday, Prof. Sagan published a large feature entitled "The Nuclear Winter" and ennobled by a quotation from Dante's *Inferno:* "Into the eternal darkness, into fire, into ice." This is, according to Dr. Sagan's thesis, where we are heading if we continue preparing to meet the nuclear challenge. His argument is highlighted in *Parade's* pages by sentences like: "Scientists initially underestimated the effects of nuclear explosions. What else have we overlooked?" "Even small nuclear wars can have devastating climatic effects . . . enough to generate an epoch of cold and dark." "It is not yet too late. We can safeguard the planetary civilization and the human family if we so choose."

Dr. Sagan presents his data and reasoning in a way that inspires esteem, and we are not in a position to refute his inferences and assertions. But we know that there are many scientists, scholars, nuclear physicists, and high-technology sages who have more to say on the subject than he does, who are competent enough to contradict him, reject his speculations, demolish his conclusions, come up with knowledge, data, and empirical evidence that make his suppositions frail, tenuous, unconvincing, or downright false. But we know something else; although those scientists often present *their* argument in public, they will never be published by *Parade,* a paper committed to one sort of journalistic integrity only—the liberal one. *Parade* serves the liberal political agenda and therefore feels free *not* to present both sides of an issue to its readers.

Yet, in a boxed sequel to his article, the "distinguished scientist"—as *Parade* calls Dr. Sagan—reveals himself as either a political illiterate or a political operative of those who do not wish us well. To mobilize *Parade's* readers, he urges them to support proposals which would thwart the efforts designed to defend America as we know it and still cherish it. He writes:

> The Soviet Union has several times, including in addresses by its late President Brezhnev, indicated its support for massive cutbacks in the global strategic arsenals. I believe that a major bilateral reduction in nuclear armaments might be carried out safely—particularly if the ingenuity and dedication that went into developing strategic weapons systems in the first place were devoted to finding a way out of the deadly trap we have set for ourselves.

Those are distortions of truth at best, hostile and devious propaganda statements at worst. Since the very beginning of nuclear negotiations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the leaders of the latter have loudly supported for public consumption "massive cutbacks" and rabidly opposed any concept of *objective* verification of such actions. On-site inspection of the disarmament process has been many times, and in diverse documents, nonnegotiably rejected by the Russians on dialectical grounds: as imperialists, we are untrustworthy, even if we open to the Soviets all our laboratories,

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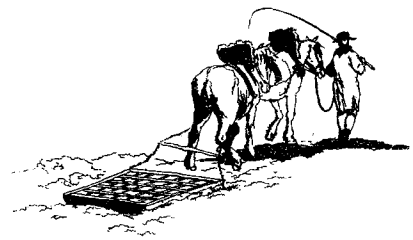
testing facilities, and factories; as communists, they are so moral and honest that there's no reason to allow our inspectors to monitor *their* compliance with formal agreements. In other words, *our* standards of objectivity and *theirs* are so qualitatively different (ours nefarious and vile, theirs impeccably just) that this problem will remain forever insoluble. But Prof. Sagan is uninterested in the subtleties of epistemology: he's ready to accept the Hottentot ethics of the communists because for him it is of *lesser* gravity than astrophysical calculations. We understand him. We do not think we could ever agree with him. □

JOURNALISM

The Smell of Leftist Venom

Confusion reigns supreme, incoherent grievances and demands abound, and they are voiced every day by the American left with the help of the servile American media which adoringly highlight leftist exegetes and prophets. Ready-to-wear premonitions have reached a point of no return. Half of the left-veering scientists claim that in the wake of a thermonuclear war life on this planet will expire because extreme cold temperatures will make biological survival impossible. The other half maintains that industrial pollution will take care of us because the nonstop warming of the atmosphere will either suffocate us with heat waves or result in a deluge caused by the melting of polar icecaps. It seems, therefore, that we have no escape. Yet, a careful reading of the left-liberal copy permits us to detect an innuendo that the ones guilty for the dismal state of the world can be found and pinpointed. Once we know them, the catastrophe—in fact, *every* catastrophe—may be successfully avoided. And there's no need to look far for them because they are, invariably, the elected officials of the U.S. government. Consequently, if we are not afraid to think logically, the even larger culprit can be defined: it is the American public, for we elected them. Certainly, we may go one step further and conclude that the horrendous American sociopolitical institutions, A.K.A. *the system,* are at the roots of the evil, since they constantly bring into office villains who are abhorred by the American liberal left.



The New Yorker has emerged as the shrillest left-liberal modern haruspex and, at the same time, premier "better Red than dead" unilateralist organ. Its divorce from reality verges on the grotesque. Following the Grenada episode, the assorted limousine radicals that congregate and nosh in its mid-Manhattan editorial offices frantically bewailed the people's-right-to-know principle, which they maintained was brutally raped by the Reagan administration, and exhorted the people/public not to stand for it. About the same time, the *Chicago Tribune,* after weeks of lamentations on the same subject, opened its "Voice of the people" section to the public and then published several letters under the heading "Views on news ban in the invasion of Grenada," all of which ardently supported Reagan and forcefully articulated the message that if the press didn't like it, then to hell with it. Such a response to the press's jeremiads became a pattern in every major daily in the nation. None of the letters contained an ounce of sympathy for the clamor voiced by *The New Yorker.* We have little doubt that given an opportunity to gainsay whatever *The New Yorker* preaches, the people/public would do it with gusto: unfortunately, *The New Yorker* does not print letters to the editor. Recently, one of its editorials reported on a conference attended by left-liberal scientific oracles including Carl Sagan and Paul Ehrlich, and bemoaned an alleged, if not entirely untrue, indifference of the American media to the conference's message:

> Nevertheless, the scientists were telling us—not for the first time, of course, but now with more compelling supporting evidence than ever before—that, in their admittedly fallible judgment, our species is in immediate peril of extinction in a nuclear holocaust. . . . It would have made sense for the news media, in a deliberate break with their tradition of waiting for things to occur before reporting on them, to treat the findings of the conference as though they had been extinction itself. Under this admittedly novel procedure, it would have been appropriate if, for example, every newspaper in the world had turned over its entire front page to headlines announcing the conference's findings and if, at the same time, every television station in the world had beamed those findings at the public for a full twenty-four hours.

The very nature of cant, as it is strenuously promoted by *The New Yorker,* is vested in what the magazine implies without saying. The connotation is that "every newspaper in the world" and "every television station" is enthusiastic about the conference's message, only we here, in this country, are not. Exactly the opposite is true: Professors Sagan's and Ehrlich's convictions and speculations are available at supermarket counters and are constantly featured in lowbrow "family" magazines that reach millions of readers. Whereas a Soviet scientist who would try to transmit the same message to the Soviet public would spend the rest of his days studying snow in a Siberian tundra. How *The New Yorker* envisages inducing the Soviet leadership and press to disseminate Messrs. Sagan's and Ehrlich's message is never made clear. This lack somehow encapsulates the very marrow of conscious or unconscious dishonesty of all the peace-freeze,

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antideterrence, antinuclear protest movements, actions, propaganda, and initiatives. Facing the Soviet Union as we know it, those ideas and enterprises are one vociferous appeal for issuing a driver's license to someone who is armless, legless, and blind. □

Credit Where Due

In a recent *Time* article about widespread public hostility to the media, a former editor of the Detroit *Free Press* responded to conservative critics who allege that he and his colleagues distort the news to fit their liberal bias with a complaint of his own:

> I find it particularly objectionable that none of our critics will give us credit for stupidity. To them, it is always a deliberate distortion.

Correction, please! We vehemently protest. We've spent five long years in fully acknowledging the mental capacities of liberal journalists. □

Madmen & Liars

Gary Deeb, a so-called TV "critic" for, among others, Gannett newspapers, formulated this "opinion" about the notorious ABC visual scam:

> If there is one thing that's absolutely wonderful about *The Day After,* it's the possibility that it could be the first step in terrifying millions of people around the world into demanding an end to this nuclear madness.

Is he a dangerous simpleton or a simple liar? How does he want to present the movie to the millions in Leningrad, Murmansk, and Odessa, so that they will be smitten with video terror and so demand "an end" to whatever he thinks (to use the word loosely) should be demanded?

He is not alone in his efforts. The premier organ of American sleazo *gauchisme, The Nation,* links President Reagan to the ghost of old Joe Kennedy (the assassinated President's father) and concludes in its editorial:

> they share the same paranoia about the Soviet evil.

Paranoia? After what we know about 60,000,000 or more persons murdered in the Gulags and about all the other Soviet imperialist atrocities perpetrated on neighboring nations? Did *The Nation's* editors diligently and obediently study psychology at those mental institutes around Moscow where the Soviet idea of psychiatry boils down to murdering human minds? Do they, by any chance, dream of putting their education to further domestic use? □

LIBERAL CULTURE

A Penny for Playboy's *Thoughts*

As is well known, people buy *Playboy* only for the interviews with Carter, Toynbee and William Buckley. However, when the editors of that periodical recently selected one Penny Baker as their 30th-anniversary Playmate, from among 7,000 eager contestants, they somehow neglected to ask Ms. Baker many questions except how fast she could remove the clothing obscuring the photographer's view of her physical boundaries. Fortunately, a columnist for the *Chicago Tribune* corrected this inexplicable oversight by ascertaining and publishing Ms. Baker's novel perspectives on morality, history, and aesthetics. In response to his question as to why she posed for the *Playboy* centerfold, she responded with subtle comparative casuistry:

> I think it's really great what I did. I really like the pictures. I mean . . . I see gay magazines showing men nude on the cover—in full view. Really dirty stuff. So what I did is no big deal.

Countering the observation that 20 years ago most women would not have done such a thing, she displayed her firm grasp on *Playboy* historiography:

> Gee, I wouldn't know about that. Twenty years ago I wasn't even born yet.

When the columnist boorishly pressed the issue, she explicated the interrelationship between mimesis and sexual ethics:

> I think the photographs of me are really pretty. It's not like people are seeing me naked in person. They're seeing a photograph. That's different. . . . So no problem.

Was Ms. Baker always possessed of such a keenly philosophic insight into her new profession? No, she admits that in high school, she "was shocked" by publications like *Playboy:* "I thought they were dirty." Since then, she has learned many things, including precise articulation:

> I guess I matured or got wiser or however you want to put it.

As a final validation for her career decision, Ms. Baker invoked its ubiquitous popularity and explored the nuances of multiple personality:

> Look, by this time there have been so many pictures of naked women in so many magazines . . . everyone has seen so many naked women! When I see the pictures of myself in Playboy, sometimes I don't even think its me. Do you understand what I mean? There have been so many naked bodies, it might as well be somebody else's body.

By making this final piercing observation, Ms. Baker established her acumen as a new force in modern epistemology. She should be rewarded with the chair of philosophy of contemporary culture, preferably at some Ivy League site of learning and wisdom. □

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